

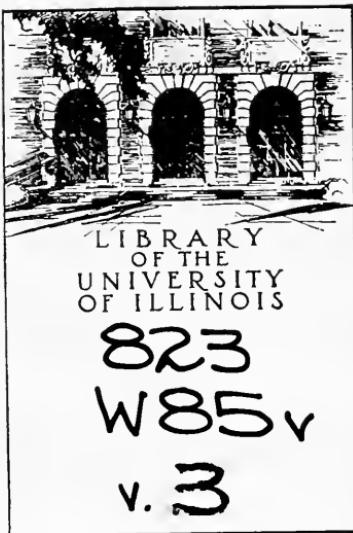
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VERNER'S PRIDE.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "MRS. HALLIBURTON'S TROUBLES," ETC., ETC.

"Searching the window for a flint, I found
This paper, thus sealed up: and I am sure
It did not lie there when I went to bed."

Shakespeare.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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VERNER'S PRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING OUT FOR THE WORST.

THE night passed quietly at Verner's Pride. Not, for all its inmates, pleasantly. Faithful Tynn bolted and barred the doors and windows with his own hand, as he might have done on the anticipated invasion of a burglar. He then took up his station to watch the approaches to the house, and never stirred until morning light. There may have run in Tynn's mind some vague fear of violence, should his master and Frederick Massingbird come in contact.

How did Lionel pass it? Wakeful and watchful as Tynn. He went to bed; but sleep, for him, there was none. His wife, by his side, slept all through the night. Better, of course, for her that it should be so: but, that her frame of mind could be sufficiently easy to admit of sleep, was a perfect marvel to Lionel. Had he needed proof to convince him how shallow was her mind, how incapable she

was of depth of feeling, of thought, this would have supplied it. She slept throughout the night. Lionel never closed his eyes: his brain was at work, his mind was troubled, his heart was aching. Not for himself. His position was certainly not one to be envied: but, in his great anxiety for his wife, self passed out of sight. To what conflict might she not be about to be exposed! to what unseemly violence of struggle, outwardly and inwardly, might she not expose herself! He knew quite well that, according to the laws of God and man, she was Frederick Massingbird's wife; not his. He should never think—when the time came—of disputing Frederick Massingbird's claim to her. But, what would she do?—how would she act? He believed in his honest heart, that Sibylla, in spite of her aggravations shown to him, and whatever may have been her preference for Frederick Massingbird in the early days, best cared for him, Lionel, now. He believed that she would not willingly return to Frederick Massingbird. Or, if she did, it would be for the sake of Verner's Pride.

He was right. Heartless, selfish, vain, and ambitious, Verner's Pride possessed far more attraction for Sibylla than did either Lionel or Frederick Massingbird. Allow her to keep quiet possession of that, and she would not cast much thought to either of them. If the conflict actually came, Lionel felt, in his innate refinement, that the proper course for Sibylla to adopt would be to retire from all social ties, partially to retire from

the world—as Miss West had suggested she should do now in the uncertainty. Lionel did not wholly agree with Miss West. He deemed that, in the uncertainty, Sibylla's place was by his side, still his wife: but, when once the uncertainty was set at rest by the actual appearance of Frederick Massingbird, then let her retire. It was the only course that he could pursue, were the case his own. His mind was made up upon one point—to withdraw himself out of the way when that time came. To India, to the wilds of Africa—anywhere, far, far away. Never would he remain to be an eye-sore to Sibylla or Frederick Massingbird,—inhabiting the land that they inhabited, breathing the air that sustained life in them. Sibylla might rely on one thing—that when Frederick Massingbird did appear beyond doubt or dispute, that very hour he said adieu to Sibylla. The shock soothed—and he would soothe it for her to the very utmost of his power—he should depart. He would be no more capable of retaining Sibylla in the face of her first husband, than he could have taken her, knowingly, from that husband in his lifetime.

But where *was* Frederick Massingbird? Tynn's opinion had been—he had told it to his master—that when he saw Frederick Massingbird steal into the grounds of Verner's Pride the previous evening, he was coming on to the house, there and then. Perhaps Lionel himself had entertained the same conviction. But the night had passed, and no

Frederick Massingbird had come. What could be the meaning of it? What could be the meaning of his dodging about Deerham in this manner, frightening the inhabitants?—of his watching the windows of Verner's Pride? Verner's Pride was his; Sibylla was his; why, then, did he not arrive to assume his rights?

Agitated with these and many other conflicting thoughts, Lionel lay on his uneasy bed, and saw in the morning light. He did not rise until his usual hour: he would have risen far earlier but for the fear of disturbing Sibylla. To lie there, a prey to these reflections, to this terrible suspense, was intolerable to him, but he would not risk the waking her. The day might prove long enough and bad enough for her, without arousing her to it before her time. He rose, but she slept on still: Lionel did wonder how she could.

Not until he was going out of the room, dressed, did she awake. She awoke with a start. It appeared as if recollection, or partial recollection, of the last night's trouble flashed over her. She pushed aside the curtain, and called to him in a sharp tone of terror.

“Lionel!”

He turned back. He drew the curtain entirely away, and stood by her side. She caught his arm, clasping it convulsively.

“Is it a dreadful dream, or is it true?” she uttered, beginning to tremble. “Oh, Lionel, take care of me! Won’t you take care of me?”

"I will take care of you as long as I may," he whispered tenderly.

"You will not let him force me away from you? You will not give up Verner's Pride? If you care for me, you will not."

"I do care for you," he gently said, avoiding a more direct answer. "My whole life is occupied in caring for you, in promoting your happiness and comfort. How I *have* cared for you, you alone know."

She burst into tears. Lionel bent his lips upon her hot face. "Depend upon my doing all that I can do," he said.

"Are you going to leave me by myself?" she resumed in fear, as he was turning to quit the room. "How do I know but he may be bursting in upon me?"

"Is that all your faith in me, Sibylla? He shall not intrude upon you here: he shall not intrude upon you anywhere without warning. When he does come, I shall be at your side."

Lionel joined his guests at breakfast. His wife did not. With smiling lips and bland brow, he had to cover a mind full of intolerable suspense, an aching heart. A minor puzzle—though nothing compared to the puzzle touching the movements of Frederick Massingbird—was working within him, as to the movements of Captain Cannonby. What could have become of that gentleman? Where could he be halting on his journey? Had his halt anything to do with them, with this grievous business?

To Lionel's great surprise, just as they were concluding breakfast, he saw the close carriage driven to the door, attended by Wigham and Bennet. You may remember the latter name. Master Dan Duff had called him "Calves" to Mr. Verner. If Verner's Pride could not keep its masters, it kept its servants. Lionel knew he had not ordered it; and he supposed his wife to be still in bed. He went out to the men.

"For whom is the carriage ordered, Bennet?"

"For my mistress, I think, sir."

And at that moment Lionel heard the steps of his wife upon the stairs. She was coming down, dressed. He turned in, and met her in the hall. "Are you going out?" he cried, his voice betokening surprise.

"I can't be worried with this uncertainty," was Sibylla's answer, spoken anything but courteously. "I am going to make Deborah tell me all she knows, and where she heard it."

"But—"

"I won't be dictated to, Lionel," she querulously stopped him with. "I will go. What is it to you?"

He turned without a remonstrance, and attended her to the carriage, placing her in it as considerately as though she had met him with a wife's loving words. When she was seated, he leaned towards her. "Would you like me to accompany you, Sibylla?"

"I don't care about it."

He closed the door in silence, his lips compressed. There were times when her fitful moods vexed him above common. This was one. When they knew not but the passing hour might be the last of their union, the last they should ever spend together, it was scarcely seemly to mar its harmony with ill temper. At least, so felt Lionel. Sibylla spoke as he was turning away.

"Of course I thought you would go with me. I did not expect you would grumble at me for going."

"Get my hat, Bennet," he said. And he stepped in and took his seat beside her.

Courteously and smiling, as though not a shade of care were within ages of him, Lionel bowed to his guests as the carriage passed the breakfast-room windows. He saw that curious faces were directed to him; he felt that wondering comments, as to their early and sudden drive, were being spoken; he knew that the scene of the past evening was affording food for speculation. He could not help it; but these minor annoyances were as nothing, compared to the great trouble that absorbed him. The windows passed, he turned to his wife.

"I have neither grumbled at you for going, Sibylla, nor do I see cause for grumbling. Why should you charge me with it?"

"There! you are going to find fault with me again! Why are you so cross?"

Cross! He cross! Lionel suppressed at once the retort that was rising to his lips; as he had done hundreds of times before.

"Heaven knows, nothing was further from my thoughts than to be 'cross,'" he answered, his tone full of pain. "Were I to be cross to you, Sibylla, in—in—what may be our last hour together, I should reflect upon myself for my whole life afterwards."

"It is not our last hour together!" she vehemently answered. "Who says it is?"

"I trust it is not. But I cannot conceal from myself the fact that it may be so. Remember," he added, turning to her with a sudden impulse, and clasping both her hands within his in a firm, impressive grasp—"remember that my whole life, since you became mine, has been spent for you: in promoting your happiness; in striving to give you more love than has been given to me. I have never met you with an unkind word; I have never given you a clouded look. You will think of this when we are separated. And, for myself, its remembrance will be to my conscience as a healing balm."

Dropping her hands, he drew back to his corner of the chariot, his head leaning against the fair white watered silk, as if heavy with weariness. In truth, it was so: heavy with the weariness caused by carking care. He had spoken all too impulsively: the avowal was wrung from him in the moment's bitter strife. A balm upon his conscience that he had done his duty by her in love? Ay. For the love of his inmost heart had been another's—not hers.

Sibylla did not understand the allusion. It was

well. In her weak and trifling manner, she was subsiding into tears when the carriage suddenly stopped. Lionel, his thoughts never free, since a day or two, of Frederick Massingbird, looked up with a start, almost expecting to see him.

Lady Verner's groom had been galloping on horseback to Verner's Pride. Seeing Mr. Verner's carriage, and himself inside it, he had made a sign to Wigham, who drew up. The man rode up to the window, a note in his hand.

"Miss Verner charged me to lose no time in delivering it to you, sir. She said it was immediate. I shouldn't else have presumed to stop your carriage."

He backed his horse a step or two, waiting for the answer, should there be any. Lionel ran his eyes over the contents of the note.

"Tell Miss Verner I will call upon her shortly, Philip."

And the man, touching his hat, turned his horse round, and galloped back towards Deerham Court.

"What does she want? What is it?" impatiently asked Sibylla.

"My mother wishes to see me," replied Lionel.

"And what else? I know *that's* not all," reiterated Sibylla, her tone a resentful one. "You have always secrets at Deerham Court against me."

"Never in my life," he answered. "You can read the note, Sibylla."

She caught it up, devouring its few lines rapidly. Lionel believed it must be the doubt, the un-

certainty, that was rendering her so irritable : in his heart he felt inclined to make every allowance for her ; more perhaps than she deserved. There were but a few lines :

“ Do come to us at once, my dear Lionel ! A most strange report has reached us, and mamma is like one bereft of her senses. She wants you here to contradict it : she says, she knows it cannot have any foundation.”

“ DECIMA.”

Somehow the words seemed to subdue Sibylla’s irritation. She returned the note to Lionel, and spoke in a hushed, gentle tone. “ Is it *this* report that she alludes to, do you think, Lionel ? ”

“ I fear so. I do not know what other it can be. I am vexed that it should already have reached the ears of my mother.”

“ Of course ! ” resentfully spoke Sibylla. “ You would have spared *her* ! ”

“ I would have spared my mother, had it been in my power. I would have spared my wife,” he added, bending his grave, kind face towards her, “ that, and all other ill.”

She dashed down the front blinds of the carriage, and laid her head upon his bosom, sobbing repentantly.

“ You would bear with me, Lionel, if you knew the pain I have here”—touching her chest. “ I am sick and ill with fright.”

He did not answer that he *did* bear with her, bear

with her most patiently—as he might have done. He only placed his arm round her that she might feel its shelter; and, with his gentle fingers, pushed the golden curls away from her cheeks, for her tears were wetting them.

She went into her sister's house alone. She preferred to do so. The carriage took Lionel on to Deerham Court. He dismissed it when he alighted; ordering Wigham back to Miss West's, to await the pleasure of his mistress.

CHAPTER II.

ENDURANCE.

LIONEL had, probably, obeyed the summons sooner than was expected by Lady Verner and Decima; sooner, perhaps, than they deemed he could have obeyed it. Neither of them was in the breakfast-room: no one was there but Lucy Tempest.

By the very way in which she looked at him,—the flushed cheeks, the eager eyes,—he saw that the tidings had reached her. She timidly held out her hand to him, her anxious gaze meeting his. Whatever may have been the depth of feeling entertained for him, Lucy was too single-minded not to express all she felt of sympathy.

“Is it true?” were her first whispered words, offering no other salutation.

“Is what true, Lucy?” he asked. “How am I to know what you mean?”

They stood looking at each other. Lionel waiting for her to speak; she hesitating. Until Lionel was perfectly certain that she alluded to that particular report, he would not speak of it. Lucy moved a few steps from him, and stood nervously playing with the ends of her waist-band, the soft colour rising deeper in her cheeks.

"I do not like to tell you," she said simply. "It would not be a pleasant thing for you to hear, if it be not true."

"And still less pleasant for me, if it be true," he replied, the words bringing him conviction that the rumour they had heard was no other. "I fear it is true, Lucy."

"That—some one—has come back?"

"Some one who was supposed to be dead."

The avowal seemed to take from her all hope. Her hands fell listlessly by her side, and the tears rose to her eyes. "I am so sorry!" she breathed. "I am so sorry for you, and for—for—"

"My wife. Is that what you were going to say?"

"Yes, it is. I did not like much to say it. I am truly grieved. I wish I could have helped it?"

"Ah! you are not a fairy with an all-powerful wand yet, Lucy, as we read of in children's books. It is a terrible blow, for her and for me. Do you know how the rumour reached my mother?"

"I think it was through the servants. Some of them heard it, and old Catherine told her. Lady Verner has been like any one wild: but for Decima, she would have started—"

Lucy's voice died away. Gliding in at the door, with a white face and drawn-back lips, was Lady Verner. She caught hold of Lionel, her eyes searching his countenance for the confirmation of her fears, or their contradiction. Lionel took her hands in his.

"It is true, mother. Be brave for my sake."

With a wailing cry she sat down on the sofa, drawing him beside her. Decima entered and stood before them, her hands clasped in pain. Lady Verner made him tell her all the particulars: all he knew, all he feared.

"How does Sibylla meet it?" was her first question when she had listened to the end.

"Not very well," he answered, after a momentary hesitation. "Who could meet it well?"

"Lionel, it is a judgment upon her. She—"

Lionel started up, his brow flushing.

"I beg your pardon, mother. You forget that you are speaking of my wife. She *is* my wife," he more calmly added, "until she shall have been proved not to be."

No. Whatever may have been Sibylla's conduct to him personally, neither before her face nor behind her back, would Lionel forget one jot of the respect due to her. Or suffer another to forget it; although that other should be his mother.

"What shall you do with her, Lionel?"

"Do with her?" he repeated, not understanding how to take the question."

"When the man makes himself known?"

"I am content to leave that to the time," replied Lionel, in a tone that debarred further discussion.

"I knew no good would come of it," resumed Lady Verner, persistent in expressing her opinion. "But for the wiles of that girl you might have married happily, might have married Mary Elmsley."

"Mother, there is trouble enough upon us just now without introducing old vexations," rejoined Lionel. "I have told you before that had I never set eyes upon Sibylla after she married Frederick Massingbird, Mary Elmsley would not have been my wife."

"If he comes back, he comes back to Verner's Pride?" pursued Lady Verner, in a low tone, breaking the pause which had ensued.

"Yes. Verner's Pride is his."

"And what shall you do? Turned, like a beggar, out on the face of the earth?"

Like a beggar? Ay, far more like a beggar than Lady Verner, in her worst apprehension, could picture.

"I must make my way on the earth as I best can," he replied in answer. "I shall leave Europe. Probably for India. I may find some means, through my late father's friends, of getting my bread there."

Lady Verner appeared to appreciate the motive which no doubt dictated the suggested course. She did not attempt to controvert it; she only wrung her hands in passionate wailing.

"Oh, that you had not married her! that you had not subjected yourself to this dreadful blight!"

Lionel rose. There were limits of endurance even for his aching heart. Reproaches in a moment of trouble are as cold iron entering the soul.

"I will come in another time when you are more

yourself, mother," was all he said. "I could have borne sympathy from you, this morning, better than complaint."

He shook hands with her. He laid his hand in silence on Decima's shoulder with a fond pressure as he passed her; her face was turned from him, the tears silently streaming down it. He nodded to Lucy, who stood at the other end of the room, and went out. But, ere he was half-way across the ante-room, he heard hasty footsteps behind him. He turned to behold Lucy Tempest, her hands extended, her face streaming down with tears.

"Oh, Lionel, please not to go away thinking nobody sympathises with you! I am so grieved: I am so sorry! If I can do anything for you, or for Sibylla, to lighten the distress, I will do it."

He took the pretty, pleading hands in his, bending his face until it was nearly on a level with hers. But, that emotion nearly over-mastered him in the moment's anguish, the very consciousness that he might be free from married obligations, would have rendered his manner cold to Lucy Tempest. Whether Frederick Massingbird was alive or not, *he* must be a man isolated from other wedded ties, so long as Sibylla remained on the earth. The kind young face, held up to him in its grief, disarmed his reserve. He spoke out to Lucy as freely as he had done in that long-ago illness, when she was his full confidant. Nay, whether from her looks, or from some lately untouched chord in his memory re-awakened, that old time was before him now,

rather than the present. As his next words proved.

"Lucy, with one thing and another, my heart is half broken. I wish I had died in that illness. Better for me! Better—perhaps—for you."

"Not for me," said she, through her tears. "Do not think of me. I wish I could help you in this great sorrow!"

"Help from you of any sort, Lucy, I forfeited in my blind wilfulness," he hoarsely whispered. "God bless you!" he added, wringing her hands to pain. "God bless you for ever!"

She did not loose them. He was about to draw his hands away, but she held them still, her tears and sobs nearly choking her.

"You spoke of India. Should it be that land that you choose for your exile, go to papa. He may be able to do great things for you. And, if in his power, he *would* do them, for Sir Lionel Verner's sake. Papa longs to know you. He always says so much about you in his letters to me."

"You have never told me so, Lucy."

"I thought it better not to talk to you too much," she simply said. "And you have not been always at Deerham."

Lionel looked at her, holding her hands still. She knew how futile it was to affect ignorance of truths in that moment of unreserve; she knew that her mind and its feelings were as clear to Lionel as though she had been made of glass, and she spoke freely in her open simplicity. She knew—probably

—that his deepest love and esteem were given to her. Lionel knew it, if she did not; knew it to his very heart's core. He could only reiterate his prayer, as he finally turned from her—

“ God bless you, Lucy, for ever, and for ever ! ”

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN CANNONBY.

DEERHAM abounded in inns. How they all contrived to get a living, nobody could imagine. That they did jog along somehow, was evident ; but they appeared to be generally as void of bustle as were their lazy sign-boards, basking in the sun on a summer's day. The best in the place, one with rather more pretension to superiority than the rest, was the Golden Fleece. It was situated at the entrance to Deerham, not far from the railway station; not far either from Deerham Court: in fact, between Deerham Court and the village.

As Lionel approached it, he saw the landlord standing at its entrance—John Cox. A rubicund man, with a bald head, who evidently did justice to his own good cheer, if visitors did not. Shading his eyes with one hand, he had the other extended in the direction of the village, pointing out the way to a strange gentleman who stood beside him.

“ Go as straight as you can go, sir, through the village, and for a goodish distance beyond it,” he was saying, as Lionel drew within hearing. “ It will bring you to Verner's Pride. You can't mistake it : it's the only mansion thereabouts.”

The words caused Lionel to cast a rapid glance at the stranger. He saw a man of some five-and-thirty or forty years, fair of complexion once, but bronzed now by travel, or other causes. The landlord's eyes fell on Lionel.

"Here is Mr. Verner!" he hastily exclaimed. "Sir,"—saluting Lionel—"this gentleman was going up to you at Verner's Pride."

The stranger turned; holding out his hand in a free and pleasant manner to Lionel. "My name is Cannonby."

"I could have known it by the likeness to your brother," said Lionel, shaking him by the hand. "I saw him yesterday. I was in town, and he told me you were coming. But why were you not with us last night?"

"I turned aside on my journey to see an old military friend—whom, by the way, I found to be out—and did not get to Deerham until past ten," explained Captain Cannonby. "I thought it too late to invade you, so put up here until this morning."

Lionel linked his arm within Captain Cannonby's, and drew him onwards. The moment of confirmation was come. His mind was in too sad a state to allow of his beating about the bush: his suspense had been too sharp and urgent for him to prolong it now. He plunged into the matter at once.

"You have come to bring me some unpleasant news, Captain Cannonby. Unhappily, it will be

news no longer. But you will give me the confirming particulars."

Captain Cannonby looked as if he did not understand. "Unpleasant news?" he repeated.

"I speak"—and Lionel lowered his voice—"of Frederick Massingbird. You know, probably, what I would ask. How long have you been cognisant of these unhappy facts?"

"I declare, Mr. Verner, I don't know what you mean," was Captain Cannonby's answer, given in a hearty tone. "To what do you allude?"

Lionel paused. Was it possible that he—Captain Cannonby—was in ignorance? "Tell me one thing," he said. "Your brother mentioned that you had heard, as he believed, some news connected with me and—and my wife, in Paris, which had caused you to hurry home, and come down to Verner's Pride. What was that news?"

"The news I heard was, that Mrs. Massingbird had become Mrs. Verner. I had intended to find her out when I got to Europe, if only to apologise for my negligence in not giving her news of John Massingbird or his property—which news I could never gather for myself—but I did not know precisely where she might be. I heard in Paris that she had married you, and was living at Verner's Pride."

Lionel drew a long breath. "And that was all?"

"That was all."

Then he was in ignorance of it! But, to keep him in ignorance was impossible. Lionel must ask

confirmation or non-confirmation of the death. With low voice and rapid speech he mentioned the fears and the facts. Captain Cannonby gathered them in, withdrew his arm from Lionel's, and stood staring at him.

"Fred Massingbird alive, and come back to England!" he uttered, in bewildered wonder.

"We cannot think otherwise," replied Lionel.

"Then, Mr. Verner, I tell you that it cannot be. It *cannot* be, you understand. I saw him die. I saw him laid in the grave."

They had not walked on. They stood there, looking at each other, absorbed in themselves, oblivious to the attention that might be fixed on them from any stray passers-by. At that moment there were no passers-by to fix it; the bustle of Deerham only began with the houses, and those they had not yet reached.

"I would give all my future life to believe you," earnestly spoke Lionel; "to believe that there can be no mistake. For my wife's sake."

"There is no mistake," reiterated Captain Cannonby. "I saw him dead; I saw him buried. A parson, in the company halting there, read the burial service over him."

"You may have buried him, fancying he was dead," suggested Lionel, giving utterance to some of the wild thoughts of his imaginings. "And—forgive me for bringing forward such pictures—the mistake may have been discovered in time—and—"

"It could not be," interrupted Captain Cannonby.

"I am quite certain he was dead. Let us allow, if you will, for argument's sake, that he was not dead when he was put into the ground. Five minutes' lying there, with the weight of earth upon him, would have effectually destroyed life; had any been left in him to destroy. There was no coffin, you must remember."

"No?"

"Parties to the gold-fields don't carry a supply of coffins with them. If death occurs *en route*, it has to be provided for in the simplest and most practical form. At least, I can answer that such was the case with regard to Fred Massingbird. He was buried in the clothes he wore when he died."

Lionel was lost in abstraction.

"He died at early dawn, just as the sun burst out to illumine the heavens, and at mid-day he was buried," continued Captain Cannonby. "I saw him buried. I saw the earth shovelled in upon him; nay, I helped to shovel it. I left him there; we all left him, covered over; at rest for good in this world. Mr. Verner, dismiss this great fear; rely upon it that he was, and is, dead."

"I wish I could rely upon it!" spoke Lionel. "The fear, I may say the certainty, has been so unequivocally impressed upon my belief, that a doubt must remain until it is explained who walks about, bearing his outward appearance. He was a very remarkable-looking man, you know. The black mark on his cheek alone would render him so."

"And that black mark is visible upon the cheek of the person who is seen at night?"

"Conspicuously so. This ghost—as it is taken for—has nearly frightened one or two lives away. It is very strange."

"Can it be anybody got up to personate Fred Massingbird?"

"Unless it be himself, that is the most feasible interpretation," observed Lionel. "But it does not alter the mystery. It is not only in the face and the black mark that the likeness is discernible, but in the figure also. In fact, in all points this man bears the greatest resemblance to Frederick Massingbird—at least, if the eyes of those who have seen him may be trusted. My own butler saw him last night; the man passed close before him, turning his face to him in the moment of passing. He says there can be no doubt that it is Frederick Massingbird."

Captain Cannonby felt a little staggered. "If it should turn out to be Frederick Massingbird, all I can say is, that I shall never believe anybody's dead again. It will be like an incident in a drama. I should next expect my old father to come to life, who has lain these twelve years past at Kensal Green Cemetery. Does Mrs. Verner know of this?"

"She does, unfortunately. She was told of it during my absence yesterday. I could have wished it kept from her, until we were at some certainty."

"Oh, come, Mr. Verner, take heart!" impulsively

cried Captain Cannonby, all the improbabilities of the case striking forcibly upon him. "The thing is not possible ; it is not indeed."

"At any rate your testimony will be so much comfort for my wife," returned Lionel, gladly. "It has comforted me. If my fears are not entirely dispelled, there's something done towards it."

Arrived at the Belvedere Road, Lionel looked about for his carriage. He could not see it. At that moment Jan turned out of the surgery. Lionel asked him if he had seen Sibylla.

"She is gone home," replied Jan. "She and Miss Deb split upon some rock, and Sibylla got into her carriage, and went off in anger."

He was walking away with his usual rapid strides, on his way to some patient, when Lionel caught hold of him. "Jan, this is Captain Cannonby. The friend who was with Frederick Massingbird when he died. He assures me that he is dead. Dead and buried. My brother, Captain Cannonby."

"There cannot be a doubt of it," said Captain Cannonby, alluding to the death. "I saw him die ; I helped to bury him."

"Then who *is* it that walks about, dressed up as his ghost ?" debated Jan.

"I cannot tell," said Lionel, a severe expression arising to his lips. "I begin to think with Captain Cannonby ; that there can be no doubt that Frederick Massingbird is dead ; therefore, he, it is not. But that it would be undesirable, for my wife's sake, to make this doubt public, I would have

every house in the place searched. Whoever it may be, he is concealed in one of them."

"Little doubt of that," nodded Jan. "I'll pounce upon him, if I get the chance."

Lionel and Captain Cannonby continued their way to Verner's Pride. The revived hope in Lionel's mind strengthened with every step they took. It did seem impossible, looking at it from a practical, matter-of-fact point of view, that a man buried deep in the earth, and supposed to be dead before he was placed there, could come to life again.

"What a relief for Sibylla!" he involuntarily cried, drawing a long, relieved breath on his own score. "This must be just one of those cases, Captain Cannonby, when good Catholics, in the old days, made a vow to the Virgin of so many valuable offerings, should the dread be removed and turn out to have been no legitimate dread at all."

"Ay. I should like to be in at the upshot."

"I hope you will be. You must not run away from us immediately. Where's your luggage?"

Captain Cannonby laughed. "Talk to a returned gold-digger of his 'luggage'! Mine consists of a hand portmanteau, and that is at the Golden Fleece. I can order it up here if you'd like me to stay with you a few days. I should enjoy some shooting beyond everything."

"That is settled, then," said Lionel. "I will see that you have your portmanteau. Did you get rich at the Diggings?"

The captain shook his head. "I might have made something, had I stuck at it. But I grew sick of it altogether. My brother, the doctor, makes a sight of money, and I can get what I want from him," was the candid confession.

Lionel smiled. "These rich brothers in reserve are a terrible lag upon self-exertion. Here we are!" he added, as they turned in at the gates. "This is Verner's Pride."

"What a fine place!" exclaimed Captain Cannonby, bringing his steps to a halt as he gazed at it.

"Yes it is. Not a pleasant prospect, was it, to contemplate the being turned out of it by a dead man?"

"A dead— You do not mean to say that Frederick Massingbird—if in life—would be the owner of Verner's Pride?"

"Yes, he would be. I was its rightful heir, and why my uncle willed it away from me, to one who was no blood relation, has remained a mystery to this day. Frederick Massingbird succeeded, to my exclusion. I only came into it with his death."

Captain Cannonby appeared completely thunderstruck at the revelation. "Why, then," he cried, after a pause, "this may supply the very motive-power that is wanting, for one to personate Fred Massingbird."

"Scarcely," replied Lionel. "No ghost, or seeming ghost, walking about in secret at night, could get Verner's Pride resigned to him. He must

come forward in the broad face of day, and establish his identity by indisputable proof."

"True, true. Well, it is a curious tale! I should like, as I say, to witness the winding-up."

Lionel looked about for his wife. He could not find her. But few of their guests were in the rooms; they had dispersed somewhere or other. He went up to Sibylla's dressing-room, but she was not there. Mademoiselle Benoite was coming along the corridor as he left it again.

"Do you know where your mistress is?" he asked.

"Mais certainement," responded Mademoiselle. "Monsieur will find Madame at the archerie."

He bent his steps to the targets. On the lawn, flitting amidst the other fair archers, in her dress of green and gold, was Sibylla. All traces of care had vanished from her face, her voice was of the merriest, her step of the fleetest, her laugh of the lightest. Truly, Lionel marvelled. There flashed into his mind the grieving face of another, whom he had not long ago parted from; grieving for their woes. Better for his mind's peace, that these contrasts had not been forced so continually upon him.

Could she, in some unaccountable manner, have heard the consoling news that Cannonby brought? In the first moment, he thought it must be so: in the next, he knew it to be impossible. Smothering down a sigh, he went forward, and drew her apart from the rest; choosing that covered walk where he

had spoken to her a day or two previously, regarding Mrs. Duff's bill. Taking her hands in his, he stood before her, looking with a reassuring smile into her face.

"What will you give me for some good news, Sibylla?"

"What about?" she rejoined.

"Need you ask? There is only one point upon which news could greatly interest either of us, just now. I have seen Cannonby. He is here, and—"

"Here! At Verner's Pride!" she interrupted. "Oh, I shall like to see Cannonby: to talk over old Australian times with him."

Who was to account for her capricious moods? Lionel remembered the evening, during the very moon not yet dark to the earth, when Sibylla had made a scene in the drawing-room, saying she could not bear to hear the name of Cannonby, or to be reminded of the past days in Melbourne. She was turning to fly to the house, but Lionel caught her.

"Wait, wait, Sibylla! Will you not hear the good tidings I have for you? Cannonby says there cannot be a doubt that Frederick Massingbird is dead. He left him dead and buried; as he told you in Melbourne. We have been terrified and pained—I trust—for nothing."

"Lionel, look here," said she, receiving the assurance in the same equable manner that she might have heard him assert it was a fine day, or a wet one, "I have been making up my mind not to

let this bother worry me. That wretched old maid Deborah went on to me with such rubbish this morning about leaving you, about leaving Verner's Pride, that she vexed me to anger. I came home and cried; and Benoite found me lying upon the sofa; and when I told her what it was, she said, the best plan was, not to mind, to meet it with a laugh, instead of tears——”

“Sibylla!” he interposed, in a tone of pain.
“You surely did not make a confidant of Benoite!”

“Of course I did,” she answered, looking as if surprised at his question, his tone. “Why not? Benoite cheered me up, I can tell you, better than you do. ‘What matter to cry?’ she asked. ‘If he does come back, you will still be the mistress of Verner’s Pride.’ And so I shall.”

Lionel let go her hands. She sped off to the house, eager to find Captain Cannonby. He—her husband—leaned against the trunk of a tree, bitter mortification in his face, bitter humiliation in his heart. Was this the wife to whom he had bound himself for ever? Well could he echo in that moment Lady Verner’s reiterated assertion, that she was not worthy of him. With a stifled sigh that was more like a groan, he turned to follow her.

“Be still, be still!” he murmured, beating his hand upon his bosom, that he might still its pain.
“Let me bear on, doing my duty by her always in love!”

That pretty Mrs. Jocelyn ran up to Lionel, and intercepted his path. Mrs. Jocelyn would have

liked to intercept it more frequently than she did, if she had but received a little encouragement. She tried hard for it, but it never came. One habit, at any rate, Lionel Verner had not acquired, amid the many strange examples of an artificial age—that of not paying considerate respect, both in semblance and reality, to other men's wives.

"Oh, Mr. Verner, what a truant you are! You never come to pick up our arrows."

"Don't I?" said Lionel, with his courteous smile. "I will come presently if I can. I am in search of Mrs. Verner. She is gone in to welcome a friend who has arrived."

And Mrs. Jocelyn had to go back to the targets alone.

CHAPTER IV.

“ DON’T THROTTLE ME, JAN ! ”

THERE was a good deal of sickness at present in Deerham: there generally was in the autumn season. Many a time did Jan wish he could be master of Verner’s Pride just for twelve months, or of any other “Pride” whose revenues were sufficient to remedy the evils existing in the poor dwellings: the ill accommodation, inside; the ill draining, out. Jan, had that desirable consummation arrived, would not have wasted time in thinking over it; he would have commenced the work in the same hour with his own hands. However, Jan, like most of us, had not to do with things as they might be, but with things as they were. The sickness was great, and Jan, in spite of his horse’s help, was, as he often said, nearly worked off his legs.

He had been hastening to a patient when encountered by Lionel and Captain Cannonby. From that patient he had to hasten to others, in a succession of relays, as it were, all day long: sometimes his own legs in requisition, sometimes the horse’s. About seven o’clock he got home to tea, at which Miss Deborah made him comfortable.

Truth to say, Miss Deborah felt rather inclined to pet Jan as a son. He had gone there a boy, and Miss Deb, though the years since had stolen on and on, and had changed Jan into a man, had not allowed her ideas to keep pace with them. So do we cheat ourselves! There were times when a qualm of conscience came over Miss Deb. Remembering how hard Jan worked, and that her father took more than the lion’s share of the profits, it appeared to her scarcely fair. Not that she could alter it, poor thing! All she could do was, to be as economical as possible, and to study Jan’s comforts. Now and again she had been compelled to go to Jan for money, over and above the stipulated sum paid to her. Jan gave it as freely and readily as he would have filled Miss Amilly’s glass pot with castor oil. But Deborah West knew that it came out of Jan’s own pocket; and, to ask for it, went terribly against her feelings and her sense of justice.

The tea was over. But she took care of Jan’s. Some nice tea, and toasted tea-cakes, and a plate of ham. Jan sat down by the fire, and, as Miss Deb said, took it in comfort. Truth to say, had Jan found only the remains of the teapot, and stale bread-and-butter, he might have thought it comfortable enough for him: he would not have grumbled had he found nothing.

“Any fresh messages in, do you know, Miss Deb?” he inquired.

“Now do pray get your tea in peace, Mr. Jan,

and don't worry yourself over 'fresh messages,'" responded Miss Deb. "Master Cheese was called out to the surgery at tea-time, but I suppose it was nothing particular, for he was back again directly."

"Of course!" cried Jan. "He'd not lose his tea without a fight for it."

Jan finished his tea and departed to the surgery, catching sight of the coat-tails of Mr. Bitterworth's servant leaving it. Master Cheese was seated with the leech basin before him. It was filled with Orleans plums, of which he was eating with uncommon satisfaction. Liking variations of flavour in fruit, he occasionally diversified the plums with a sour codlin apple, a dozen or so of which he had got stowed away in his trousers pockets. Bob stood at a respectful distance, his eyes wandering to the tempting collation, and his mouth watering. Amongst the apples Master Cheese had come upon one three parts eaten away by the grubs, and this he benevolently threw to Bob. Bob had disposed of it, and was now vainly longing for more.

"What did Bitterworth's man want?" inquired Jan of Master Cheese.

"The Missis is took bad again, he says," responded that gentleman, as distinctly as he could speak for the apples and the plums. "Croup, or something. Not as violent as it was before. Can wait."

"You had better go up at once," was Jan's reply.

Master Cheese was taken aback. "I go up!" he repeated, pulling a face as long as his arm. "All

that way! I had to go to Baker’s and to Flint’s between dinner and tea.”

“And to how many Bakers and Flints do I have to go between dinner and tea?” retorted Jan. “You know what to give Mrs. Bitterworth. So start.”

Master Cheese felt aggrieved beyond everything. For one thing, it might be dangerous to leave those cherished plums in the leech basin, Bob being within arm’s length of them: for another, Master Cheese liked his ease better than walking. He cast some imploring glances at Jan, but they produced no effect, so he had to get his hat. Vacillating between the toll that might be taken of the plums if he left them, and the damage to his hair if he took them, he finally decided on the latter course. Emptying the plums into his hat, he put it on his head. Jan was looking over what they termed the call-book.

“Miss Deb says you were called out at tea-time,” observed Jan, as Master Cheese was departing. “Who was it?”

“Nobody but old Hook. The girl was worse.”

“What! Alice? Why have you not got it down here?” pointing to the book.

“Oh, they are nobody,” grumbled Master Cheese. “I wonder the paupers are not ashamed to come here to our faces, asking for attendance and physic! They know they’ll never pay.”

“That’s my business,” said Jan. “Did he say she was very ill?”

"‘Took dangerous,’ *he* said,” returned Master Cheese. “Thought she’d not live the night out.”

Indefatigable Jan put on his hat, and went out with Master Cheese. Master Cheese turned leisurely towards Mr. Bitterworth’s; Jan cut across the road at a strapping pace, and took the nearest way to Hook’s cottage. It led him past the retired spot where he and the Reverend Mr. Bourne had found Alice lying that former night.

Barely had Jan gained it when some tall, dark form came pushing through the trees at right angles, and was striding off to the distance. One single moment’s indecision—for Jan was not sure at first in the uncertain light—and then he put his long legs to their utmost speed, bore down, and pinned the intruder.

“Now then!” said Jan. “Ghost or no ghost, who are you?”

He was answered by a laugh, and some joking words:

“Don’t throttle me quite, Jan. Even a ghost can’t stand that.”

The tone of the laugh, the tone of the voice, fell upon Jan Verner’s ears with the most intense astonishment. He peered into the speaker’s face with his keen eyes, and gave vent to an exclamation. In spite of the whiskerless cheeks, the elaborate black mark, in spite of the strange likeness to his brother, Jan recognised the features, not of Frederick, but of John Massingbird.

CHAPTER V.

DRESSING UP FOR A GHOST.

AND so the mystery was out. And the ghost proved to be no ghost at all,—to be no husband of Sibylla—come to disturb the peace of her and of Lionel; but *John* Massingbird in real flesh and blood.

There was so much explanation to ask and to be given, that Jan' was somewhat hindered on his way to Hook's.

“I can't stop,” said he, in the midst of a long sentence of John's. “Alice Hook may be dying. Will you remain here until I come back?”

“If you are not long,” responded John Massingbird. “I intend this to be the last night of my concealment, and I want to go about, terrifying the natives. The fun it has been !”

“Fun you call it!” remarked Jan. “If Hook's girl does die, it will lie at your door.”

“*She* won't die,” lightly answered John. “I'll send her a ten-pound note to make amends. Make you haste, Jan, if I am to wait.”

Jan sped off to Hook's. He found the girl very ill, but not so much so as Cheese had intimated. Some unseemly quarrel had taken place in the cottage, which had agitated her.

"There's no danger," mentally soliloquised Jan, "but it has thrown her back a good two days."

He found John Massingbird—restless John!—restless as ever!—pacing before the trees with hasty strides, and bursting into explosions of laughter.

"Some woman was coming along from one of the cottages by Broom's, and I appeared to her, and sent her on, howling," he explained to Jan. "I think it was Mother Sykes. The sport this ghost affair has been!"

He sat down on a bench, held his sides, and let his laughter have vent. Laughter is contagious, and Jan laughed with him, but in a quieter way.

"Whatever put it into your head to personate Frederick?" inquired Jan. "Was it done to frighten the people?"

"Not at first," answered John Massingbird.

"Because, if to frighten had been your motive, you need only have appeared in your own person," continued Jan. "You were thought to be dead, you know, as much as Fred was. Fred *is* dead, I suppose?"

"Fred is dead, poor fellow, safe enough. I was supposed to be dead, but I came to life again."

"Did you catch Fred's star when he died?" asked Jan, pointing to the cheek.

"No," replied John Massingbird, with another burst of laughter, "I get that up with Indian-ink."

Bit by bit, Jan came into possession of the details. At least, of as much of them as John Massingbird deemed it expedient to furnish. It

appeared that his being attacked and robbed and left for dead, when travelling down to Melbourne, was perfectly correct. Luke Roy quitted him, believing he was dead. Luke would not have quitted him so hastily, but that he wished to be on the track of the thieves, and he hastened to Melbourne. After Luke's departure, John Massingbird came, as he phrased it, to life again. He revived from the suspended animation, or swoon, which, prolonged over some hours, had been mistaken for death. The bullet was extracted from his side, and he progressed pretty rapidly towards recovery.

Luke meanwhile had reached Melbourne; and had come in contact with a family of the name of Eyre. Luke—if you have not forgotten—had said to Mr. Eyre that he had obtained a clue to the men who robbed his master; such, at least, was the information given by that gentleman to Sibylla Massingbird, on her subsequent sojourn at his house. He, Mr. Eyre, had said that Luke had promised to return the following day and inform him how he sped in the search, but that Luke never did return; that he had never seen him afterwards. All true. Luke found the clue, which he thought he had gained, to be no clue at all; but he heard news that pleased him better than fifty clues would have done—that his master, Mr. Massingbird, was alive. One who had travelled down to Melbourne from where John was lying, gave him the information. Without waiting to break bread or draw

water, without giving another thought to Mr. Eyre, Luke started off there and then, to retrace his steps to John Massingbird. John was nearly well then, and they returned at once to the diggings. In his careless way, he said the loss must be given up for a bad job ; they should never find the fellows, and the best plan was to pick up more gold to replace that gone. Luke informed him he had written home to announce his death. John went into a fit of laughter, forbade Luke to contradict it, and anticipated the fun he should have in surprising them, when he went home on the accumulation of his fortune. Thus he stopped at the diggings, remaining in complete ignorance of the changes which had taken place ; the voyage of Frederick and his wife to Melbourne, the death of Mr. Verner, the subsequent death of Frederick ; and above all --for that would have told most on John—of the strange will left by Mr. Verner, which had constituted him the inheritor of Verner's Pride.

But fortune did not come in the rapid manner fondly expected by John. The nuggets seemed shy. He obtained enough to rub along with, and that was all. The life did not ill suit him. To such a man as Lionel Verner, of innate refinement, just and conscientious, the life would have been intolerable, almost worse than death. John was not overburthened with any one of those qualities, and he rather liked the life than not. One thing was against him : he had no patience. Roving about from place to place, he was satisfied nowhere long.

It was not only that he perpetually changed the spot, or bed, of work, but he changed from one settlement to another. This was the reason probably that Captain Cannonby had never met with him; it was more than probable that it was the cause of his non-success. Luke Roy was not so fond of roving. He found a place likely to answer his expectations, and he remained at it; so that the two parted early, and did not again meet afterwards.

Suddenly John Massingbird heard that he had been left heir to Verner's Pride. He had gone down to Melbourne; and some new arrival from England—from the county in which Verner's Pride was situated—mentioned this in his hearing. The stranger was telling the tale of the unaccountable will of Mr. Verner, of the death of John and Frederick Massingbird, and of the *consequent* accession of Lionel Verner; telling it as a curious bit of home gossip, unconscious that one of his listeners was the first-named heir—the veritable John Massingbird.

Too much given to act upon impulse, allowing himself no time to ascertain or to inquire whether the story might be correct or not, John Massingbird took a berth in the first ship advertised for home. He possessed very little more money than would pay for his passage; he gave himself no concern how he was to get back to Australia, or how exist in England, should the news prove incorrect, but started away off-hand. Providing for the future had never been made a trouble by John Massingbird.

He sailed, and he arrived safely. But, once in England, it was necessary to proceed rather cautiously ; and John, careless and reckless though he was, could not ignore the expediency of so acting. There were certain reasons why it would not be altogether prudent to show himself in the neighbourhood of Verner's Pride, unless his pocket were weighty enough to satisfy sundry claims which would inevitably flock in upon him. Were he sure that he was the legitimate master of Verner's Pride, he would have driven up in a coach-and-six, with flying flags and streamers to the horses' heads, and so have announced his arrival in triumph. *Not* being sure, he preferred to feel his way, and this could not be done by arriving openly.

There was one place where he knew he could count upon being sheltered, while the way was "felt." And this was Giles Roy's. Roy would be true to him ; would conceal him if need was ; and help him off again, did Verner's Pride, for him, prove a myth. This thought John Massingbird put in practice, arriving one dark night at Roy's, and startling Mrs. Roy nearly to death. Whatever fanciful ghosts the woman may have seen before, she never doubted that she saw a real ghost now.

His first question, naturally, was about the will. Roy told him it was perfectly true that a will had been made in his favour ; but the will had been superseded by a codicil. And he related the circumstance of that codicil's mysterious loss. Was it found ? John eagerly asked. Ah ! there Roy

could not answer him ; he was at a nonplus ; he was unable to say whether the codicil had been found or not. A rumour had gone about Deerham, some time subsequently to the loss, that it *had* been found, but Roy had never come to the rights of it. John Massingbird stared as he heard him say this. Then, couldn't he tell whether he was the heir or not ? whether Lionel Verner held it by established right or by wrong ? he asked. And Roy shook his head—he could not.

Under these uncertainties, Mr. John Massingbird did not see his way particularly clear. Either to stop, or to go. If he stopped, and showed himself, he might be unpleasantly assured that the true heir of Verner's Pride inhabited Verner's Pride ; if he went back to Australia, the no less mortifying fact might come out afterwards, that he was the heir to Verner's Pride, and had run away from his own.

What was to be done ? Roy suggested perhaps the best plan that could be thought of—that Mr. Massingbird should remain in his cottage in concealment, while he, Roy, endeavoured to ascertain the truth regarding the codicil. And John Massingbird was fain to adopt it. He took up his abode in the upper bedroom, which had been Luke's, and Mrs. Roy, locking her front door, carried his meals up to him by day, Roy setting himself to ferret out—as you may recollect—all he could learn about the codicil. The "all" was not much. Ordinary gossipers knew no more than Roy, whether the codicil had been found or

not ; and Roy tried to pump Matiss, by whom he got baffled—he even tried to pump Mr. Verner. He went up to Verner's Pride, ostensibly to ask whether he might paper Luke's old room at his own cost. In point of fact, the paper was in a dilapidated state, and he did wish to put it decent for John Massingbird ; but he could have done it without speaking to Mr. Verner. It was a great point with Roy to find favour in the sight of Mr. Massingbird, his possible future master. Lionel partially saw through the man ; he believed that he had some covert motive in seeking the interview with him, and that Roy was trying to pry into his affairs. But Roy found himself baffled also by Mr. Verner, as he had been by Matiss, in so far as that he could learn nothing certain of the existence or non-existence of the codicil.

Two days of the condemned confinement were sufficient to tire out John Massingbird. To a man of active, restless temperament, who had lived almost day and night under the open skies, the being shut up in a small, close room, was well-nigh unbearable. He could not stamp on its floor (there was no space to *walk* on it), lest any intrusive neighbour below, who might have popped in, unwanted, should say, “ Who have ye got up aloft ? ” He could not open the window and put his head out, to catch a breath of fresh air, lest prying eyes might be cast upon him.

“ I can't stand this,” he said to Roy. “ A week of it would kill me. I shall go out at night.”

Roy opposed the resolve so far as he dared—having an eye always to the not displeasing his future master. He represented to John Massingbird that he would inevitably be seen; and that he might just as well be seen by day as by night. John would not listen to reason. That very night, as soon as dark came on, he went out, and *was* seen. Seen by Robin Frost.

Robin Frost, whatever superstitions or fond feelings he may have cherished, regarding the hoped-for reappearance of Rachel's spirit, was no believer in ghosts in a general point of view. In fact, that it was John Massingbird's ghost, never once entered Robin's mind. He came at once to the more sensible conclusion that some error had occurred with regard to his reported death, and that it was John Massingbird himself.

His deadly enemy. The only one, of all the human beings upon earth, with whom Robin was at issue. For he believed that it was John Massingbird who had worked the ill to Rachel. Robin, in his blind vengeance, took to lying in wait with a gun: and Roy became cognisant of this.

"You must not go out again, sir," he said to John Massingbird: "he may shoot you dead."

Curious, perhaps, to say, John Massingbird had himself come to the same conclusion—that he must not go out again. He had very narrowly escaped meeting one, who would as surely have known him, in the full moonlight, as did Robin Frost: one, whom it would have been nearly as

inconvenient to meet, as it was Robin. And yet—stop in perpetual confinement by day and by night, he could not: he persisted that he should be dead. Almost better go back, unsatisfied, to Australia.

A bright idea occurred to John Massingbird. He would personate his brother. Frederick, so far as he knew, had neither creditors nor enemies round Deerham; and the likeness between them was so great, both in face and form, that there would be little difficulty in it. When they were at home together, John had been the stouter of the two: but his wanderings had fined him down, and his figure now looked exactly as Frederick's did formerly. He shaved off his whiskers—Frederick had never worn any; or, for the matter of that, had had any to wear—and painted an imitation star on his cheek with Indian ink. His hair, too, had grown long on the voyage, and had not yet been cut: just as Frederick used to wear his. John had favoured a short crop of hair; Frederick a long one.

These little toilette mysteries accomplished, so exactly did he look like his brother Frederick, that Roy started when he saw him; and Mrs. Roy went into a prolonged scream that might have been heard at the brick-fields. John attired himself in a long, loose dark coat which had seen service at the diggings, and sallied out: the coat which had been mistaken for a riding habit.

He enjoyed himself to his heart's content, receiving more fun than he had bargained for. It

had not occurred to him to personate Frederick's *ghost*: he had only thought of personating Frederick himself: but to his unbounded satisfaction, he found the former climax arrived at. He met old Matthew Frost; he frightened Dan Duff into fits; he frightened Master Cheese; he startled the parson; he solaced himself by taking up his station under the yew-tree on the lawn at Verner's Pride, to contemplate that desirable structure, which perhaps was his, and the gaiety going on in it. He had distinctly seen Lionel Verner leave the lighted rooms and approach him; upon which he retreated. Afterwards, it was rather a favourite night-pastime of his, the standing under the yew-tree at Verner's Pride. He was there again the night of the storm.

All this, the terrifying people into the belief that he was Frederick's veritable ghost, had been the choicest sport to John Massingbird. The trick might not have availed with Robin Frost, but they had found a different method of silencing him. Of an easy, good-tempered nature, the thought of any real damage from consequences had been completely passed over by John. If Dan Duff did go into fits, he'd recover from them; if Alice Hook was startled into something worse, she was not dead. It was all sport to free-and-easy John: and, but for circumstances, there's no knowing how long he might have carried this game on. These circumstances touched upon a point that influences us all, more or less: pecuniary consideration. John was minus funds, and it was necessary that some-

thing should be done : he could not continue to live upon Roy.

It was Roy himself who at length hit upon the plan that brought forth the certainty about the codicil. Roy found rumours were gaining ground abroad that it was not Frederick Massingbird's ghost, but Frederick himself ; and he knew that the explanation must soon come. He determined to way-lay Tynn, and make an apparent confidant of him : by these means he should, in all probability, arrive at the desired information. Roy did so : and found that there was no codicil. He carried his news to John Massingbird, advising that gentleman to go at once and put in his claim to Verner's Pride. John, elated with the news, protested he'd have one more night's fun first.

Such were the facts. John Massingbird told them to Jan, suppressing any little bit that he chose, here and there. The doubt about the codicil, for instance, and its moving motive in the affair, he did not mention.

" It has been the best fun I ever had in my life," he remarked. " I never shall forget the parson's amazed stare, the first time I passed him. Or old Tynn's, either, last night. Jan, you should have heard Dan Duff howl ! "

" I have," said Jan. " I have had the pleasure of attending him. My only wonder is, that he did not put himself into the pool, in his fright : as Rachel Frost did, time back."

John Massingbird caught the words up hastily.

"How do you know that Rachel put herself in? She may have been put in."

"For all I know, she may. Taking circumstances into consideration, however, I should say it was the other way."

"I say, Jan," interrupted John Massingbird, with another explosion, "didn't your Achates, Cheese, arrive at home in a mortal fright one night?"

Jan nodded.

"I shall never forget him; never. He was marching up, all bravely, till he saw my face. Didn't he turn tail! There has been one person above all others, Jan, that I have wanted to meet, and have not. Your brother Lionel."

"He'd have pinned you," said Jan.

"Not he. You would not have done it to-night, but that I *let* you do it. No chance of anybody catching me, unless I chose. *I* was on the look out for all I met, for all to whom I chose to show myself: *they* met me unawares. Unprepared for the encounter, while they were recovering their astonishment, I was beyond reach. Last night I had been watching over the gate ever so long, when I darted out in front of Tynn, to astonish him. Jan"—lowering his voice—"has it put Sibylla in a fright?"

"I think it has put Lionel in a worse," responded Jan.

"For fear of losing her?" laughed John Massingbird. "Wouldn't it have been a charming

prospect for some husbands, who are tired of their wives ! Is Lionel tired of his ? ”

“ Can’t say,” replied Jan. “ There’s no appearance of it.”

“ I should be, if Sibylla had been my wife for two years,” candidly avowed John Massingbird. “ Sibylla and I never hit it off well as cousins : I’d not own her as wife, if she were dowered with all the gold mines in Australia. What Fred saw in her was always a puzzle to me. *I* knew what was going on between them, though nobody else did. But, Jan, I’ll tell you what astonished me more than everything else when I learnt it—that Lionel should have married her subsequently. I never could have imagined Lionel Verner taking up with another man’s wife.”

“ She was his widow,” cried literal Jan.

“ All the same. ’Twas another man’s leavings. And there’s something about Lionel Verner, with his sensitive refinement, that does not seem to accord with the notion. Is she healthy ? ”

“ Who ? Sibylla ? I don’t fancy she has much of a constitution.”

“ No, that she has not ! There are no children, I hear. Jan, though, you need not have pinched so hard when you pounced upon me,” he continued, rubbing his arm. “ I was not going to run away.”

“ How did I know that ? ” said Jan.

“ It’s my last night of fun, and when I saw you I said to myself, ‘ I’ll be caught.’ How are old Deb and Amilly ? ”

"Much as usual. Deb's in a fever just now. She has heard that Fred Massingbird's back, and thinks Sibylla ought to leave Lionel on the strength of it."

John laughed again. "It must have put others in a fever, I know, besides poor old Deb. Jan, I can't stop talking to you all night, I should get no more fun. I wish I could appear to all Deerham collectively, and send it into fits after Dan Duff! To-morrow, as soon as I genteelly can after breakfast, I go up to Verner's Pride and show myself. One can't go at six in the morning."

He went off in the direction of Clay Lane as he spoke, and Jan turned to make the best of his way to Verner's Pride.

CHAPTER VI.

A THREAT TO JAN.

THEY had dined unusually late at Verner's Pride that evening, and Lionel Verner was with his guests, making merry with the best heart he had. Now, he would rely upon the information given by Captain Cannonby; the next moment he was feeling that the combined testimony of so many eye-witnesses must be believed, and that it could be no other than Frederick Massingbird. Tynn had been with the man face to face only the previous night; Roy had distinctly asserted that he was back, in life, from Australia. Whatever *his* anxiety may have been, his wife seemed at rest. Full of smiles and gaiety, she sat opposite to him, glittering gems in her golden hair, shining forth from her costly robes.

"Not out from dinner!" cried Jan, in his astonishment, when he arrived, and Tynn denied him to Lionel. "Why, it's my supper time! I must see him, whether he's at dinner or not. Go and say so, Tynn. Something important, tell him."

The message brought Lionel out. Thankful, probably, to get out. The playing the host with a mind ill at ease, how it jars upon the troubled and fainting spirit! Jan, disdaining the invitation to the

drawing-room, had hoisted himself on the top of an old carved ebony cabinet that stood in the hall, containing curiosities, and sat there with his legs dangling. He jumped off when Lionel appeared, wound his arm within his, and drew him out on the terrace.

"I have come to the bottom of it, Lionel," said he, without further circumlocution. "I dropped upon the ghost just now and pinned him. It is not Fred Massingbird."

Lionel paused, and then drew a deep breath; like one who has been relieved from some great care.

"Cannonby said it was not!" he exclaimed. "Cannonby is here, Jan, and he assures me Frederick Massingbird is dead and buried. Who is it, then? Have you found it out?"

"I pinned him, I say," said Jan. "I was going down to Hook's, and he crossed my path. He—"

"It is somebody who has been doing it for a trick?" interrupted Lionel.

"Well—yes—in one sense. It is not Fred Massingbird, Lionel: he is dead, safe enough; but it is somebody from a distance; one who will cause you little less trouble. Not any less, in fact, putting Sibylla out of the question."

Lionel stopped in his walk—they were pacing the terrace—and looked at Jan with some surprise; a smile, in his new security, lighting his face.

"There is nobody in the world, Jan, dead or alive, who could bring trouble to me, save Frederick Mas-

singbird. Anybody else may come, so long as he does not."

"Ah! You are thinking only of Sibylla."

"Of whom else should I think?"

"Yourself," replied Jan.

Lionel laughed in his gladness. *How* thankful he was for his wife's sake ONE alone knew. "I am nobody, Jan. Any trouble coming to me I can battle with."

"Well, Lionel, the returned man is John Masingbird."

"John—Mass—ingbird!"

Of all the birds in the air and the fishes in the sea—as the children say—he was the very last to whom Lionel Verner had cast a thought. That it was John who had returned, had not entered his imagination. He had never cast a doubt on the fact of his death. Bringing the name out slowly, he stared at Jan in very astonishment.

"Well," said he, presently, "John is not Frederick."

"No," assented Jan. "He can put in no claim to your wife. But he can to Verner's Pride."

The words caused Lionel's heart to go on with a bound. A great evil for him: there was no doubt of it; but still slight, compared to the one he had dreaded for Sibylla.

"There is no mistake, I suppose, Jan?"

"There's no mistake," replied Jan. "I have been talking to him this half hour. He is hiding at Roy's."

"Why should he be in hiding at all?" inquired Lionel.

"He had two or three motives he said :" and Jan proceeded to give Lionel a summary of what he had heard. "He was not very explicit to me," concluded Jan. "Perhaps he will be more so to you. He says he is coming to Verner's Pride to-morrow morning at the earliest genteel hour after breakfast."

"And what does he say to the fright he has caused ?" resumed Lionel.

"Does nothing but laugh over it. Says it's the primest fun he ever had in his life. He has come back very poor, Lionel."

"Poor? Then, were Verner's Pride and its revenues not his, I could have understood why he should not like to show himself openly. Well! well! compared to what I feared, it is a mercy. Sibylla is free; and I—I must make the best of it. He will be a more generous master of Verner's Pride—as I believe—than Frederick would ever have been."

"Yes," nodded Jan. "In spite of his faults. And John Massingbird used to have plenty."

"I don't know who amongst us is without them, Jan. Unless—upon my word, old fellow, I mean it!—unless it is you."

Jan opened his great eyes with a wondering stare. It never occurred to humble-minded Jan that there was anything in *him* approaching to goodness. He supposed Lionel had spoken in joke.

"What's that?" cried he.

Jan alluded to a sudden burst of laughter, to a sound of many voices, to fair forms that were flitting before the windows. The ladies had gone into the drawing-room. "What a relief it will be for Sibylla!" involuntarily uttered Lionel.

"She'll make a face at losing Verner's Pride," was the less poetical remark of Jan.

"Will he turn us out at once, Jan?"

"He said nothing to me on that score, nor I to him," was the answer of Jan. "Look here, Lionel. Old West's a screw, between ourselves; but what I do earn is my own: so don't get breaking your rest, thinking you'll not have a pound or two to turn to. If John Massingbird does send you out, I can manage things for you, if you don't mind living quietly."

Honest Jan! His notions of "living quietly" would have comprised a couple of modest rooms, cotton umbrellas like his own, and a mutton chop a day. And Jan would have gone without the chop himself, to give it to Lionel. To Sibylla, also. Not that he had any great love for that lady, in the abstract: but, for Jan to eat chops, while anybody, no matter how remotely connected with him, wanted them, would have been completely out of Jan's nature.

A lump was rising in Lionel's throat. *He* loved Jan, and knew his worth, if nobody else did. While he was swallowing it down, Jan went on, quite eagerly.

"Something else might be thought of, Lionel. I don't see why you and Sibylla should not come to old West's. The house is large enough: and Deb and Amilly couldn't object to it for their sister. In point of right, half the house is mine: West said so when I became his partner: and I paid my share for the furniture. He asked if I'd not like to marry, and said there was the half of the house; but I told him I'd rather be excused. I might get a wife, you know, Lionel, who'd be for grumbling at me all day, as my mother does. Now, if you and Sibylla would come there, the matter as to your future would be at rest. I'd divide what I get between you and Miss Deb. Half to her for the extra cost you'd be to the housekeeping; the other half for pocket-money for you and Sibylla. I think you might make it do, Lionel: my share is quite two hundred a year. My own share I mean: besides what I hand over to Miss Deb, and transmit to the doctor, and other expenses. Could you manage with it?"

"Jan!" said Lionel, from between his quivering lips. "Dear Jan, there's——"

They were interrupted. Bounding out at the drawing-room window, the very window at which Lucy Tempest had sat that night and watched the yew-tree, came Sibylla, fretfulness in the lines of her countenance, complaint in the tones of her voice.

"Mr. Jan Verner, I'd like to know what right you have to send for Lionel from the room when he is

at dinner? If he *is* your brother, you have no business to forget yourself in that way. He can't help your being his brother, I suppose; but you ought to know better than to presume upon it."

"Sibylla!—"

"Be quiet, Lionel. I *shall* tell him of it. Never was such a thing heard of, as for a gentleman to be called out for nothing, from his table's head! You do it again, Jan, and I shall order Tynn to shut the doors to you of Verner's Pride."

Jan received the lecture with the utmost equanimity, with imperturbable good nature. Lionel wound his arms about his wife, gravely and gently: whatever may have been the pain caused by her words, he suppressed it.

"Jan came here to tell me news that quite justified his sending for me, wherever I might be, or however occupied, Sibylla. He has succeeded in solving to-night the mystery which has hung over us; he has discovered who it is that we have been taking for Frederick Massingbird."

"It is not Frederick Massingbird," cried Sibylla, speaking sharply. "Captain Cannonby says that it cannot be."

"No, it is not Frederick Massingbird—God be thanked!" said Lionel. "With that knowledge, we can afford to hear who it is bravely; can we not, Sibylla?"

"But why don't you tell me who it is?" she retorted, in an impatient, fretful tone, not having the discernment to see that he wished to prepare

her for what was coming. "Can't you speak, Jan, if he won't? People have no right to come, dressed up in other people's clothes and faces, to frighten us to death. He ought to be transported! Who is it?"

"You will be startled, Sibylla," said Lionel. "It is one whom we have believed to be dead; though it is not Frederick Massingbird."

"I *wish* you'd tell—beating about the bush like that! You need not stare so, Jan. I don't believe you know."

"It is your cousin, Sibylla; John Massingbird."

A moment's pause. And then, clutching at the hand of Lionel—

"Who?" she shrieked.

"Hush, my dear. It is John Massingbird."

"Not dead! Did he not die?"

"No. He recovered, when left, as was supposed, for dead. He is coming here to-morrow morning, Jan says."

Sibylla let fall her hands. She staggered back to a pillar and leaned against it, her upturned face white in the starlight.

"Is—is—is Verner's pride yours or his?" she gasped, in a low tone.

"It is his."

"His! Neither yours nor mine?"

"It is only his, Sibylla."

She raised her hands again; she began fighting with the air, as if she would beat off an imaginary

John Massingbird. Another minute, and her laughter and her cries came forth together, shriek upon shriek. She was in strong hysterics. Lionel supported her, while Jan ran for water; and the gay company came flocking out of the lighted rooms to see.

CHAPTER VII.

NO HOME.

PEOPLE talk of a nine days' wonder. But no nine days' wonder has ever been heard or known, equal to that which fell on Deerham ; which went booming to the very extremity of the county's boundaries. Lionel Verner, the legitimate heir—it may so be said—the possessor of Verner's Pride, was turned out of it to make room for an alien, resuscitated from the supposed dead.

Sailors tell us that the rats desert a sinking ship. Pseudo friends desert a falling house. You may revel in these friends in prosperity, but when adversity sets in, how they fall away ! On the very day that John Massingbird arrived at Verner's Pride, and it became known that not he, but Mr. and Mrs. Verner must leave it, the gay company, gathered there, dispersed. Dispersed with polite phrases, which went for nothing. They were so very sorry for the calamity, for Mr. and Mrs. Verner ; if they could do anything to serve them they had only to be commanded. And then they left ; never perhaps to meet again, even as acquaintances. It may be asked, what could they do ? They could not invite them to a permanent home ; saddle themselves with

a charge of that sort; neither would such an invitation stand a chance of acceptance. It did not appear they could do anything; but their combined flight from the house, one after the other, did strike with a chill of mortification upon the nerves of Lionel Verner and his wife.

His wife! Ah, poor Lionel had enough upon his hands, looking on one side and another. *She* was the heaviest weight. Lionel had thanked God in his true heart that they had been spared the return of Frederick Massingbird; but there was little doubt that the return of Frederick would have been regarded by her as a light calamity, in comparison with this. She made no secret of it. Ten times a day had Lionel to curb his outraged feelings, and compress his lips to stop the retort that would rise bubbling up within them. She would openly lament that it was not Frederick who had returned, in which case she might have remained at Verner's Pride!

"You'll not turn them out, Massingbird?" cried Jan, in his straightforward way, drawing the gentleman into the fruit-garden to a private conference. "*I* wouldn't."

John Massingbird laughed good-humouredly. He had been in the sunniest humour throughout; had made his first appearance at Verner's Pride in bursts of laughter, heartily grasping the hands of Lionel, of Sibylla, and boasting of the "fun" he had had in playing the ghost. Captain Cannonby, the only one of the guests who remained, grew

charmed with John, and stated his private opinion in the ear of Lionel Verner that he was worth a hundred such as Frederick.

"How can I help turning them out?" answered he. "I didn't make the will—it was old Daddy Verner."

"You need not act upon the will," said Jan. "There was a codicil, you know, superseding it, though it can't be found. Sibylla's your cousin—it would be a cruel thing to turn her from her home."

"Two masters never answered in a house yet," nodded John. "I am not going to try it."

"Let them stop in Verner's Pride, and you go elsewhere," suggested Jan.

John Massingbird laughed for five minutes. "How uncommon *young* you are, Jan!" said he. "Has Lionel been putting you up to try this on?"

Jan swung himself on a tolerably strong branch of the mulberry-tree, regardless of any damage the ripe fruit might inflict on his nether garments, as he answered—

"Knowing Lionel, you needn't ask it, Massingbird. There'd be a difficulty in getting him to stop in Verner's Pride now, but he might be coaxed to do it for the sake of his wife. She'll have a fit of illness if she has to go out of it. Lionel is one to stand by his own to the last; while Verner's Pride was his, he'd have fought to retain its possession, inch by inch; but let ever so paltry a quibble of the

law take it from him, and he'd not lift up his finger to keep it. But I say I think he might be got to do it for Sibylla."

"I'll tell you a secret, Jan," cried John Massingbird. "I'd not have Sibylla stop in Verner's Pride if she paid me ten thousand a year for the favour. There! And as to resigning Verner's Pride the minute I come into it, nobody but a child or Jan Verner could ever have started so absurd an idea. If anything makes me feel cross, it is the thought of my having been knocking about yonder, when I might have been living in clover here. I'd get up an Ever-perpetual philanthropic benefit-my-fellow-creature Society, if I were you, Jan, and hold meetings at Exeter Hall!"

"Not in my line," said Jan, swaying himself about on the bough.

"Isn't it! I should say it was. Why don't you invite Sibylla to your house, if you are so fond of her?"

"She won't come," said Jan.

"Perhaps you have not asked her!"

"I was beginning to ask her, but she flew at me and ordered me to hold my tongue. No, I see it," Jan added, in self-soliloquy, "she'll never come there. I thought she might: and I got Miss Deb to think so. She'll—she'll——"

"She'll what?" asked John Massingbird.

"She'll be a thorn in Lionel's side, I'm afraid."

"Nothing more likely," acquiesced easy John.

"Roses and thorns go together. If gentlemen will marry the one, they must expect to get their share of the other."

Jan jumped off his bough. His projects all appeared to be failing. The more he had dwelt upon his suddenly-thought-of scheme, that Dr. West's house might afford an asylum for Lionel and his wife, the more he had become impressed with its desirability. Jan Verner, though the most unselfish, perhaps it may be said the most improvident of mortals, with regard to himself, had a considerable amount of forethought for the rest of the world. It had struck him, even before it struck Lionel, that, if turned out of Verner's Pride, Lionel would *want* a home; want it in the broadest acceptation of the word. It would have been Jan's delight to give him one. He, Jan, went home, told Miss Deb the news that it was John Massingbird who had returned, not Frederick, and imparted his views of future arrangements.

Miss Deb was dubious. For Mr. Verner of Verner's Pride to become an inmate of their home, dependent on her housekeeping, looked a formidable affair. But Jan pointed out that, Verner's Pride *gone*, it appeared to be but a choice of cheap lodgings: their house would be an improvement upon that. And Miss Deb acquiesced: and grew to contemplate the addition to her family, in conjunction with the addition Jan proposed to add to her income, with great satisfaction.

That failed. Failed upon Jan's first hint of it

to Mrs. Verner. She—to use his own expression—flew out at him, at the bare hint: and Sibylla Verner could fly out in an unseemly manner when she chose.

Jan's next venture had been with John Massingbird. That was failure the second. “Where are they to go?” thought Jan.

It was a question that Lionel Verner may also have been asking in his inmost heart. As yet he could not look his situation fully in the face. Not from any want of moral courage, but because of the inextricable confusion that his affairs seemed to be in. And, let his moral courage be what it would, the aspect they bore might have caused a more hardy heart than Lionel's to shrink. *How much he owed he could not tell;* nothing but debt stared him in the face. He had looked to the autumn rents of Verner's Pride to extricate him from a portion of his difficulties; and now those rents would be received by John Massingbird. The furniture in the house, the plate, the linen, none of it was his: it had been left by the will with Verner's Pride. The five hundred pounds, all that he had inherited by that will, had been received at the time—and was gone. One general sinking fund seemed to have swallowed up everything; that, and all else; leaving a string of debts a yard long in its place.

Reproaches now would be useless; whether self-reproach, or reproach to his wife. The latter, Lionel would never have given. And yet, when he looked

back, and thought how free from debt he might have been, nothing but reproach, however vaguely directed, reproach of the past generally, seemed to fill his heart. To turn out in the world, a free man, though penniless, would have been widely different from turning out, plunged over head and ears in difficulties.

In what quarter did he not owe money? He could not say. He had not been very provident, and Sibylla had not been provident at all. But this much might be said for Lionel: that he had not wasted money on useless things, or self-indulgence. The improvements he had begun on the estate had been the chief drain, so far as he went; and the money they took had caused him to get backward with the general expenses. He had also been over liberal to his mother. Money was owing on all sides; for large things and for small; how much, Lionel did not yet know. He did not know—he was afraid to guess—what private debts might have been contracted by his wife. There had been times lately, when, in contemplating the embarrassment growing so hopelessly upon him, Lionel had felt inclined to wish that some climax would come and end it; but he had never dreamt of such a climax as this. A hot flush dyed his cheeks as he remembered there was nearly a twelvemonth's wages owing to most of his servants; and he had not the means now of paying them.

“Stop on a bit if you like,” said John Massingbird, in a hearty tone; “stop a month, if you will.

You are welcome. It will be only changing your place from master to guest."

From master to guest! That same day John Massingbird assumed his own place, unasked, at the head of the dinner-table. Lionel went to the side with a flushed face. John Massingbird had never been remarkable for delicacy, but Lionel could not help thinking that he might have waited until he was gone, before assuming the full mastership. Captain Cannonby made the third at the dinner, and he, by John Massingbird's request, took the foot of the table. It was not the being put out of his place that hurt Lionel so much, as the feeling of annoyance that John Massingbird could behave so unlike a gentleman. He felt ashamed for him. Dinner over, Lionel went up to his wife, who was keeping her room, partly from temper, partly from illness.

"Sibylla, I'll not stop here another day," he said. "I see that John Massingbird wants us to go. Now, what shall I do? Take lodgings?"

Sibylla looked up from the sofa, her eyes red with crying, her cheeks inflamed.

"Anybody but you, Lionel, would never allow him to turn you out. Why don't you dispute the right with him? Turn *him* out, and defy him!"

He did not tell Sibylla that she was talking like a child. He only said that John Massingbird's claim to Verner's Pride was indisputable—that it had been his all along; that, in point of fact, he himself had been the usurper.

"Then you mean," she said, "to give him up quiet possession?"

"I have no other resource, Sibylla. To attempt any sort of resistance would be foolish as well as wrong."

"I shan't give it up. I shall stay here in spite of him. You may do as you like, but he is not going to get me out of my own home."

"Sibylla, will you try and be rational for once? If ever a time called for it, it is the present. I ask you whether I shall seek after lodgings."

"And I wonder that you are not ashamed to ask me," retorted Sibylla, bursting into tears. "Lodgings, after Verner's Pride! No. I'd rather die than go into lodgings. I daresay I shall die soon, with all this affliction."

"I do not see what else there is for us but lodgings," resumed Lionel, after a pause. "You will not hear of Jan's proposition."

"Go back to my old home!" she shrieked. "Like—as poor Fred used to say—bad money returned. No! that I never will. You are wrapt up in Jan: if he proposed to give me poison, you'd say Yes. I wish Fred had not died!"

"Will you be so good as tell me what *you* think ought to be done?" inquired Lionel.

"How can I think? Where's the good of asking me? I think the least you can do in this wretchedness, is to take as much worry off me as you can, Lionel."

"It is what I wish to do," he gently said. "But

I can see only one plan for us, Sibylla—lodgings. Here we cannot stay; it is out of the question. To take a house is equally so. We have no furniture—no money, in short, to set up a house, or to keep it on. Jan's plan, until I can turn myself round and see what's to be done, would be the best. You would be going to your own sisters, who would take care of you, should I find it necessary to be away."

"Away! Where?" she quickly asked.

"I must go somewhere and do something. I cannot lead an idle life, living upon other people's charity, or let you live upon it. I must find some way of earning a livelihood: in London, perhaps. While I am looking out, you would be with your sisters."

"Then, Lionel, hear me!" she cried, her throat working, her blue eyes flashing with a strange light. "I will *never* go home to my sisters! I will never, so long as I live, enter that house again, to reside! You are no better than a bear to wish me to do it."

What was he to do? She was his wife, and he must provide for her: but she would go neither into lodgings, nor to the proposed home. Lionel set his wits to work.

"I wonder—whether—my mother—would invite us there, for a short while?" The words were spoken slowly; reluctantly: as if there were an undercurrent of strong doubt in his mind. "Would you go to Deerham Court for a time, Sibylla, if Lady Verner were agreeable?"

"Yes," said Sibylla, after a minute's consideration.
"I'd go there."

Deeming it well that something should be decided, Lionel went down-stairs, caught up his hat, and proceeded to Deerham Court. He did not say a word about his wife's caprice ; or that two plans, proposed to her, had been rejected. He simply asked his mother whether she would temporarily receive him and his wife, until he could look round and decide on the future.

To his great surprise, Lady Verner answered that she would ; and answered readily. Lionel, knowing the light in which she regarded his wife, had anticipated he knew not what of objection, if not of positive refusal.

"I wish you to come here, Lionel : I intended to send for you and tell you so," was the reply of Lady Verner. "You have no home to turn to, and I could not have it said that my son in his strait was at fault for one. I never thought to receive your wife inside my doors, but for your sake I will do so. No servants, you understand, Lionel."

"Certainly not," he answered. "I cannot afford servants now as a matter of luxury."

"I can neither afford them for you, nor is there room in my house to accommodate them. This applies to that French maid of yours," Lady Verner pointedly added. "I do not like the woman : nothing would induce me to admit her here, even were circumstances convenient. Any attendance that your wife may require, she shall have."

Lionel smiled a sad smile. "Be easy, mother. The time for my wife to keep a French maid has gone by. I thank you very sincerely."

And so Lionel Verner was once more to be turned from Verner's Pride, to take up his abode with his wife in his mother's home. When were his wanderings to be at rest?

CHAPTER VIII.

TURNING OUT.

THE battle that there was with Mrs. Verner! She cried, she sobbed, she protested, she stormed, she raved. Willing enough, was she, to go to Lady Verner's; indeed the proposed visit appeared to be exceedingly palatable to her; but she was not willing to go without Mademoiselle Benoite. She was used to Benoite; Benoite dressed her, and waited on her, and read to her, and took charge of her things; Benoite was in her confidence, kept her purse; she could not do without Benoite, and it was barbarous of Lionel to wish it. How could she manage without a maid?

Lionel gravely laid his hand upon her shoulder. Some husbands might have reminded her that until she married him she had never known the services of a personal attendant: that she had gone all the way to Melbourne, had—as John Massingbird had expressed it with regard to himself—been knocking about there, and had come back home again alone, all without so much as thinking of one. Not so Lionel. He laid his hand upon her shoulder in his grave kindness.

“Sibylla, do you forget that we have no longer the

means to keep ourselves? I must find a way to do that, before I can afford you a lady's maid. My dear, I am very sorry; you know I am; for that, and all the other discomforts that you are meeting with; but there is no help for it. I trust that some time or other I shall be able to remedy it."

"We should not have to keep her," argued Sibylla. "She'd live with Lady Verner's servants."

Neither did he remind her that Lady Verner would have sufficient tax, keeping himself and her. One would have thought her own delicacy of feeling might have suggested it.

"It cannot be, Sibylla. Lady Verner has no accommodation for Benoite."

"She must make accommodation. When people used to come here to visit us, they brought their servants with them."

"Oh, Sibylla! can you not see the difference? But—what do you owe Benoite?" he added in a different tone.

"I don't owe her anything," replied Sibylla eagerly, quite mistaking the motive of the question. "I have always paid her every month. She'd never let it go on."

"Then there will be the less trouble," thought Lionel.

He called Benoite to him, then packing up Sibylla's things for Deerham Court, inquired into the state of her accounts, and found Sibylla had told him correctly. He gave Benoite a month's wages and a month's board wages, and informed her that

as soon as her mistress had left the house, she would be at liberty to leave it. A scene ensued with Sibylla, but for once Lionel was firm.

"You will have every attendance provided for you, Sibylla, my mother said. But I cannot take Benoite; neither would Lady Verner admit her."

John Massingbird had agreed to keep on most of the old servants. The superfluous ones, those who had been engaged when Verner's Pride grew gay, Lionel found the means of discharging: paying them as he had paid Benoite.

Heavy work for him, that day! the breaking up of his home, the turning forth to the world. And, as if his heart were not sufficiently heavy, he had the trouble of Sibylla. The arrangements had been three or four days in process. It had taken that time to pack and settle things, since he first spoke to Lady Verner. There were various personal trifles of his and Sibylla's to be singled out and separated from what was now John Massingbird's. But all was done at last, and they were ready to depart. Lionel went to John Massingbird.

"You will allow me to order the carriage for Sibylla? She will like it better than a hired one."

"Certainly," replied John, with much graciousness. "But what's the good of leaving before dinner?"

"My mother is expecting us," simply answered Lionel.

Just the same innate refinement of feeling which had characterised him in the old days. It so hap-

pened that Lionel had never bought a carriage since he came into Verner's Pride. Stephen Verner had been prodigal in his number of carriages, although the carriages had a sinecure of it, and Lionel had found no occasion to purchase. Of course they belonged to John Massingbird: everything else belonged to him. He—for the last time—ordered the close carriage for his wife. His carriage, it might surely be said, more than John Massingbird's. Lionel did not deem it so, and asked permission ere he gave the order.

Sibylla had never seen her husband quietly resolute in opposing her whims, as he had been with regard to Benoite. She scarcely knew what to make of it; but she had deemed it well to dry her tears, and withdraw her opposition. She came down dressed at the time of departure, and looked about for John Massingbird. That gentleman was in the study. Its large desk, a whole mass of papers crowded above it and underneath it, pushed into the remotest corner. Lionel had left things connected with the estate as straight as he could. He wished to explain affairs to John Massingbird, and hand over documents and all else in due form, but he was not allowed. Business and John had never agreed. John was sitting now before the window, his elbows on the sill, a rough cap on his head, and a short clay pipe in his mouth. Lionel glanced with dismay at the confusion reigning amid the papers.

"Fare you well, John Massingbird," said Sibylla.

"Going?" said John, coolly turning round.
"Good day."

"And let me tell you, John Massingbird," continued Sibylla, "that if ever you had got turned out of your home, as you have turned us, you would know what it was."

"Bless you! I've never had anything of my own to be turned out of, except a tent," said John, with a laugh.

"It is to be hoped that you may, then, some time, and that you will be turned out of it! That's my best wish for you, John Massingbird."

"I'd recommend you to be polite, young lady," returned John, good-humouredly. "If I sue your husband for back rents, you'd not be quite so independent, I calculate."

"Back rents!" repeated she.

"Back rents," assented John. "But we'll leave that discussion to another time. Don't you be saucy, Sibylla."

"John," said Lionel, pointing to the papers, "are you aware that some valuable leases and other agreements are amongst those papers? You might get into inextricable confusion with your tenants, were you to mislay, or lose them."

"They are safe enough," said careless John, taking his pipe from his mouth to speak.

"I wish you had allowed me to put things in order for you. You will be wanting me to do it later."

"Not a bit of it," said John Massingbird. "I

am not going to upset my equanimity with leases, and bothers of that sort. Good bye, old fellow. Lionel!"

Lionel turned round. He had been going out.

"We part friends, don't we?"

"I can answer for myself," said Lionel, a frank smile rising to his lips. "It would be unjust to blame you for taking what you have a right to take."

"All right. Then, Lionel, you'll come and see me here?"

"Sometimes. Yes."

They went out to the carriage, Lionel conducting his wife, and John in attendance, smoking his short pipe. The handsome carriage, with its coat of ultramarine, its rich white lining, its silver mountings, and its arms on the panels. The Verner arms. Would John paint them out? Likely not. One badge on the panels of his carriages was as good to John Massingbird as another. He must have gone to the Herald's College had he wanted to set up arms on his own account.

And that's how Lionel and his wife went out of Verner's Pride. It seemed as if Deerham pavement and Deerham windows were lined on purpose to watch the exodus. The time of their departure had got wind.

"I have done a job that goes again the grain, sir," said Wigham to his late master, when the carriage had deposited its freight at Deerham Court, and was about to go back again. "I never

thought, sir, to drive you out of Verner's Pride for the last time."

"I suppose not, Wigham. I thought it as little as you."

"You'll not forget, sir, that I should be glad to serve you, should you ever have room for me. I'd rather live with you, sir, than with anybody else in the world."

"Thank you, Wigham. I fear that time will be very far off."

"Or, if my lady should be changing her coachman, sir, perhaps she'd think of me. It don't seem natural to me, sir, to drive anybody but a Verner. Next to yourself, sir, I'd be proud to serve her ladyship."

Lionel, in his private opinion, believed that Lady Verner would soon be compelled to part with her own coachman, to lay down her carriage. Failing the income she had derived from his revenues, in addition to her own, he did not see how she was to keep up many of her present expenses. He said farewell to Wigham and entered the Court.

Decima had hastened forward to welcome Sibylla. Decima was one who, in her quiet way, was always trying to make the best of surrounding circumstances,—not for herself, but for others. Let things be ever so dark, she would contrive to extract out of them some little ray of brightness. Opposite as they were in person, in disposition she and Jan were true brother and sister. She came forward to the door, a glad smile upon her face, and dressed

rather more than usual. It was one of her ways, the unwonted dress, of showing welcome and consideration to Sibylla.

" You are late, Mrs. Verner," she said, taking her cordially by the hand. " We have been expecting you some time. Catherine! Thérèse, see to these packages."

Lady Verner had actually come out also. She was too essentially the lady to show anything but strict courtesy to Sibylla, now that she was about to become an inmate under her roof. What the effort cost her, she best knew. It was no light one: and Lionel felt that it was not. She stood in the hall, just outside the door of the ante-room, and took Sibylla's hand as she approached.

" I am happy to see you, Mrs. Verner," she said, with stately courtesy. " I hope you will make yourself at home."

They all went together into the drawing-room, in a crowd, as it were. Lucy was there, dressed also. She came up with a smile on her young and charming face, and welcomed Sibylla.

" It is nearly dinner-time," said Decima to Sibylla. " Will you come with me up-stairs, and I will show you the arrangements for your rooms. Lionel, will you come?"

She led the way up-stairs to the pretty sitting-room with its blue-and-white furniture, hitherto called " Miss Decima's room :" the one that Lionel had sat in when he was growing convalescent.

" Mamma thought you would like a private

sitting-room to retire to when you felt disposed," said Decima. "We are only sorry it is not larger. This will be exclusively yours."

"It is small," was the not very gracious reply of Sibylla.

"And it is turning you out of it, Decima!" added Lionel.

"I did not use it much," she answered, proceeding to another room on the same floor. "This is your bed-room, and this the dressing-room," she added, entering a spacious apartment and throwing open the door of a smaller one which led out of it. "We hope that you will find everything comfortable. And the luggage that you don't require to use, can be carried up-stairs."

Lionel had been looking round, somewhat puzzled.
"Decima! was not this Lucy's room?"

"Lucy proposed to give it up to you," said Decima. "It is the largest room we have; the only one that has a dressing-room opening from it, except mamma's. Lucy has gone to the small room at the end of the corridor."

"But it is not right for us to turn out Lucy," debated Lionel. "I do not like the idea of it."

"It was Lucy herself who first thought of it, Lionel. I am sure she is glad to do anything she can to render you and Mrs. Verner comfortable. She has been quite anxious to make it look nice, and moved nearly all the things herself."

"It does look comfortable," acquiesced Lionel as

he stood before the blaze of the fire, feeling grateful to Decima, to his mother, to Lucy, to all of them. "Sibylla, this is one of your fires; you like a blaze."

"And Catherine will wait upon you, Mrs. Verner," continued Decima. "She understands it. She waited on mamma for two years before Thérèse came. Should you require your hair done, Thérèse will do that; mamma thinks Catherine would not make any hand at it."

She quitted the room as she spoke and closed the door, saying that she would send up Catherine then. Lionel had his eyes fixed on the room and its furniture; it was really an excellent room,—spacious, lofty, and fitted up with every regard to comfort as well as to appearance. In the old days, it was Jan's room, and Lionel scarcely remembered to have been inside it since; but it looked very superior now to what it used to look then. Lady Verner had never troubled herself to improvise superfluous decorations for Jan. Lionel's chief attention was riveted on the bed, an Arabian, handsomely carved, mahogany bed, with white muslin hangings, lined with pink, matching with the window-curtains. The hangings were new; but he felt certain that the bed was the one hitherto used by his mother.

He stepped into the dressing-room, feeling more than he could have expressed, feeling that he could never repay all the kindness they seemed to be receiving. Equally inviting looked the dressing-room. The first thing that caught Lionel's eye

were some delicate paintings on the walls, done by Decima.

His gaze and his ruminations were interrupted. Violent sobs had struck on his ear from the bed-chamber; he hastened back, and found Sibylla extended at full length on the sofa, crying.

"It is such a dreadful change after Verner's Pride!" she querulously complained. "It's not half as nice as it was there! Just this old bedroom and a mess of a dressing-room, and nothing else! And only that stupid Catherine to wait upon me!"

It was ungrateful. Lionel's heart, in its impulse, resented it as such. But, ever considerate for his wife, ever wishing, in the line of conduct he had laid down for himself, to find excuses for her, he reflected the next moment that *it was* a grievous thing to be turned from a home as she had been. He leaned over her; not answering as he might have answered, that the rooms were all that could be wished, and far superior they, and all other arrangements made for them, to anything enjoyed by Sibylla until she had entered upon Verner's Pride; but he took her hand in his, and smoothed the hair from her brow, and softly whispered:

"Make the best of it, Sibylla, for my sake."

"There's no 'best' to be made," she replied, with a shower of tears, as she pushed his hand and his face away.

Catherine knocked at the door. Miss Decima had sent her and bade her say that dinner was on the

point of being served. Sibylla sprang up from the sofa, and dried her tears.

"I wonder whether I can get at my gold combs?" cried she, all her grief flying away.

Lionel turned to Catherine: an active little woman with a high colour and a sensible countenance, looking much younger than her real age. *That* was not far off fifty; but in movement and lissomeness, she was young as she had been at twenty. Nothing vexed Catherine so much as for Lady Verner to allude to her "age." Not from any notions of vanity, but lest she might be thought growing incapable of her work.

"Catherine, is not that my mother's bed?"

"To think that you should have found it out, Mr. Lionel!" echoed Catherine, with a broad smile. "Well, sir, it is, and that's the truth. We have been making all sorts of changes. Miss Lucy's bed has gone in for my lady, and my lady's has been brought here. See, what a big, wide bed it is!" she exclaimed, putting her arm on the counterpane. "Miss Lucy's was a good-sized bed, but my lady thought it would be hardly big enough for two; so she said hers should come in here."

"And what's Miss Lucy sleeping on?" asked Lionel, amused. "The boards?"

Catherine laughed. "Miss Lucy has got a small bed now, sir. Not, upon my word, that I think she'd mind if we did put her on the boards. She is the sweetest young lady to have to do with, Mr. Lionel! I don't believe there ever was one

like her. She's as easy satisfied as ever Mr. Jan was."

"Lionel! I can't find my gold combs!" exclaimed Sibylla, coming from the dressing-room, with a face of consternation. "They are not in the dressing-case. How am I to know which box Benoite has put them in?"

"Never mind looking for the combs now," he answered. "You will have time to search for things to-morrow. Your hair looks nice without combs. *I* think nicer than with them."

"But I wanted to wear them," she fractiously answered. "It is all your fault! You should not have forced me to discharge Benoite."

Did she wish him to look for the gold combs? Lionel did not take the hint. Leaving her in the hands of Catherine, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER IX.

UNPREMEDITATED WORDS.

LUCY was in the drawing-room alone when Lionel entered it. "Lady Verner," she said to him, "has stepped out to speak to Jan."

"Lucy, I find that our coming here has turned you out of your room," he gravely said. "I should earnestly have protested against it, had I known what was going to be done."

"Should you?" said she, shaking her head quite saucily. "We should not have listened to you."

"We! Whom does the 'we' include?"

"Myself and Decima. We planned everything. I like the room I have now, quite as much as that. It is the room at the end, opposite the one Mrs. Verner is to have for her sitting-room."

"The sitting-room again! What shall you and Decima do without it?" exclaimed Lionel, looking as he felt—vexed.

"If we never have anything worse to put up with than the loss of a sitting-room that was nearly superfluous, we shall not grieve," answered Lucy with a smile. "How did we do without it before—when you were getting better from that long illness? We had to do without it then."

"I think not, Lucy. So far as *my* memory serves me, you were sitting in it a great portion of your time—cheering me. I have not forgotten it, if you have."

Neither had she—by her heightened colour.

"I mean that we had to do without it for our own purposes, our drawings and our work. It is but a little matter, after all: I wish we could do more for you and Mrs. Verner. I wish," she added, her voice betraying her emotion, "that we could have prevented your being turned from Verner's Pride."

"Ay," he said, speaking with affected carelessness, and turning about an ornament in his fingers, which he had taken from the mantel-piece, "it is not an every-day calamity."

"What shall you do?" asked Lucy, going a little nearer to him, and dropping her voice to a tone of confidence.

"Do? In what way, Lucy?"

"Shall you be content to live on here with Lady Verner? Not seeking to retrieve your--your position in any way?"

"My living on here, Lucy, will be out of the question. That would never do, for more reasons than one."

Did Lucy Tempest divine what one of these reasons might be? She did not intend to look at him, but she caught his eyes in the pier-glass. Lionel smiled.

"I am thinking what a trouble you must find me. You and Decima."

She did not speak at first. Then she went quite close to him, her earnest, sympathising eyes cast up to his.

"If you please, you need not pretend to make light of it to me," she whispered. "I don't like you to think that I do not know all you must feel, and what a blow it is. I think I feel it quite as much as you can do—for your sake, and for Mrs. Verner's. I lie awake at night, thinking of it; but I do not say so to Decima and Lady Verner. I make light of it to them, as you are making light of it to me."

"I know, I know!" he uttered, in a tone that would have been a passionate one, but for its wailing despair. "My whole life, for a long while, has been one long scene of acting—to you. I dare not make it otherwise. There's no remedy for it."

She had not anticipated the outburst; she had simply wished to express her true feeling of sympathy for their great misfortunes, as she might have expressed it to any other gentleman who had been turned from his home with his wife. She could not bear for Lionel not to know that he had her deepest, her kindliest, her truest sympathy: and this had nothing to do with any secret feeling she might, or might not, entertain for him. Indeed, but for the unpleasant latent consciousness of that very feeling, Lucy would have made her sympathy more demonstrative. The outbreak seemed to check her; to throw her friendship back upon herself; and she stood irresolute; but she was too single-minded, too full of nature's truth, to be angry with what had

been a genuine outpouring of his inmost heart, drawn from him in a moment of irrepressible sorrow. Lionel let the ornament fall back on the mantelpiece, and turned to her, his manner changing. He took her hands, clasping them in one of his; he laid his other hand lightly on her fair young head, reverently as any old grandfather might have done.

“Lucy!—my dear friend!—you must not mistake me. There are times when some of the bitterness within me is drawn forth, and I say more than I ought: what I never should say, in a calmer moment. I wish I could talk to you; I wish I could give you the full confidence of all my sorrows, as I gave it you on another subject once before. I wish I could draw you to my side, as though you were my sister, or one of my dearest friends, and tell you of the great trouble at my heart. But it cannot be. I thank you, I thank you for your sympathy. I know that you would give me your friendship in all single-heartedness, as Decima might give it me; and it would be to me a green spot of brightness in life’s arid desert. But the green spot might for me grow too bright, Lucy; and my only plan is to be wise in time, and to forego it.”

“I did but mean to express my sorrow for you and Mrs. Verner,” she timidly answered. “My sense of the calamity which has fallen upon you.”

“Child, I know it: and I dare not say how I feel it; I dare not thank you as I ought. In truth it is a terrible calamity. All its consequences I cannot yet anticipate: but they may be worse than anybody

suspects, or than I like to glance at. It is a deep and apparently an irremediable misfortune : I cannot but feel it keenly : and I feel it for my wife more than for myself. Now and then, something like a glimpse of consolation shows itself—that it has not been brought on by any fault of mine ; and that, humanly speaking, I have done nothing to deserve it.”

“ Mr. Cust had used to tell us, that however dark a misfortune might be, however hopeless even, there was sure to be a way of looking at it, by which we might see that it might have been darker,” observed Lucy. “ *This* would have been darker for you, had it proved to be Frederick Massingbird, instead of John : very sadly darker for Mrs. Verner.”

“ Ay ; so far I cannot be too thankful,” replied Lionel. The remembrance flashed over him of his wife’s words that day—in her temper—she wished it had been Frederick. It appeared to be a wish that she had already thrown out frequently : not so much that she did wish it, as to annoy him.

“ Mr. Cust used to tell us another thing,” resumed Lucy, breaking the silence. “ That these apparently hopeless misfortunes sometimes turn out to be great benefits in the end. Who knows but in a short time, through some magic or other, you and Mrs. Verner may be back at Verner’s Pride ? Would not that be happiness ?”

“ I don’t know about happiness, Lucy ; sometimes I feel tired of everything,” he wearily answered. “ As if I should like to run away for ever, and be at

rest. My life at Verner's Pride was not a bed of rose-leaves."

He heard his mother's voice in the ante-room, and went forward to open the door for her. Lady Verner came in, followed by Jan. Jan was going to dine there; and Jan was actually in orthodox dinner costume. Decima had invited him, and Decima had told him to be sure to dress himself; that she wanted to make a little festival of the evening to welcome Lionel and his wife. So Jan remembered, and appeared in black: but the gloss of the whole was taken off by Jan having his shirt fastened down the front with pins, where the buttons ought to be. Brassy-looking, ugly, bent pins, as big as skewers, stuck in horizontally.

"Is that a new fashion coming in, Jan?" asked Lady Verner, pointing with some asperity to the pins.

"It's to be hoped not," replied Jan. "It took me five minutes to stick them in, and there's one of the pins running into my wrist now. It's a new shirt of mine come home, and they have forgotten the buttons. Miss Deb caught sight of it, when I went in to tell her I was coming here, and ran after me to the gate with a needle and thread, wanting to sew them on."

"Could you not have fastened it better than that, Jan?" asked Decima, smiling as she looked at the shirt.

"I don't see how," replied Jan. "Pins were the readiest to hand."

Sibylla had been keeping them waiting dinner.

She came in now, radiant in smiles and in her gold combs. None, to look at her, would suppose she had that day lost a home. A servant appeared and announced dinner.

Lionel went up to Lady Verner. Whenever he dined there, unless there were other guests besides himself, he had been in the habit of taking her in to dinner. Lady Verner drew back.

"No, Lionel. I consider that you and I are both at home now. Take Miss Tempest."

He could only obey. He held out his arm to Lucy, and they went forward.

"Am I to take anybody?" inquired Jan.

That was just like Jan! Lady Verner pointed to Sibylla, and Jan marched off with her. Lady Verner and Decima followed.

"Not there, not there, Lucy," said Lady Verner, for Lucy was taking the place she was accustomed to, by Lady Verner. "Lionel, you will take the foot of the table now, and Lucy will sit by you."

Lady Verner was rather a stickler for etiquette, and at last they fell into their appointed places. Herself and Lionel opposite each other, Lucy and Decima on one side the table, Jan and Sibylla on the other.

"If I am to have you under my wing as a rule, Miss Lucy, take care that you behave yourself," nodded Lionel.

Lucy laughed, and the dinner proceeded. But there was very probably an under current of consciousness in the heart of both—at any rate, there

was in his—that it might have been more expedient, all things considered, that Lucy Tempest's place at dinner had not been fixed by the side of Lionel Verner's.

Dinner was half over when Sibylla suddenly laid down her knife and fork, and burst into tears. They looked at her in consternation. Lionel rose.

"That horrid John Massingbird!" escaped her lips. "I always disliked him."

"Goodness!" uttered Jan, "I thought you were taken ill, Sibylla. What's the good of thinking about it?"

"According to you, there's no good in thinking of anything," tartly responded Sibylla. "You told me yesterday not to think about Fred, when I said I wished he had come back instead of John—if one must have come back."

"At any rate, don't think about unpleasant things now," was Jan's answer. "Eat your dinner."

CHAPTER X.

JAN'S SAVINGS.

LIONEL VERNER looked his situation full in the face. It was not a desirable one. When he had been turned out of Verner's Pride before, it is probable he had thought *that* about the extremity of all human calamity ; but that, looking back upon it, appeared a position to be coveted, as compared with this. In point of fact it was. He was free then from pecuniary liabilities ; he did not owe a shilling in the world ; he had five hundred pounds in his pocket ; nobody but himself to look to ; and—he was a younger man. In the matter of years he was not so very much older now ; but Lionel Verner, since his marriage, had bought some experience in human disappointment, and nothing ages a man's inward feelings like it.

He was now, with his wife, a burden upon his mother ; a burden she could ill afford. Lady Verner was somewhat embarrassed in her own means, and she was preparing to reduce her establishment to the size that it used to be in her grumbling days. If Lionel had but been free ! free from debt and difficulty ! he would have gone out into the world and put his shoulder to the wheel.

Claims had poured in upon him without end. Besides the obligations he already knew of, not a day passed but the post brought him outstanding accounts from London, with demands for their speedy settlement; debts contracted by his wife. Mr. Verner of Verner's Pride might not have been troubled with these accounts for years, had his wife so managed; but Mr. Verner, turned from Verner's Pride, a—it is an ugly word, but expressive of the truth—a pauper, found the demands come pouring thick and threefold upon his head. It was of no use to reproach Sibylla; of no use even to speak, save to ask “Is such-and-such a bill a just claim?” Any approach to such topics was the signal for an unseemly burst of passion on her part; or for a fit of hysterics, in which fashionable affectation Sibylla had lately become an adept. She *tried* Lionel terribly: worse than tongue can tell or pen can write. There was no social confidential intercourse. Lionel could not go to her for sympathy, for counsel, or for comfort; if he attempted to talk over any plans for the future, for the immediate future; what they could do, what they could not; what might be best, what worst; she met him with the frivolousness of a child, or with a sullen reproach that he “did nothing but worry her.” For any purposes of companionship, his wife was a nonentity; far better that he had been without one. She made his whole life a penance; she betrayed the frivolous folly of her nature ten times a day; she betrayed her pettish temper, her want of self-control, dyeing Lionel's

face of a blood-red. He felt ashamed for her; he felt doubly ashamed for himself; that his mother, that Lucy Tempest should at last become aware what sort of a wife he had taken to his bosom, what description of wedded life was his.

What was he to do for a living? The only thing that appeared to be open to him was to endeavour to get some sort of a situation, where, by means of the hands or the head, he might earn a competence. And yet, to do this, it was necessary to be free from the danger of arrest. He went about in dread of it. Were he to show himself in London he felt sure that not an hour would pass, but he would be sued and taken. If his country creditors accorded him forbearance, his town ones would not. Any fond hope that he had formerly entertained of studying for the Bar, was not available now. He had neither the means nor the time to give to it: the time for study ere remuneration should come. Occasionally a thought would cross him that some friend or other of his prosperity might procure for him a government situation. A consulship, or vice-consulship abroad, for instance. *Any* thing abroad: not to avoid the payment of his creditors, for whether abroad or at home, Lionel would be sure to pay them, if by dint of pinching himself he could find the means: but that he might run away from home and mortification, take his wife and make the best of her. But consulships and other government appointments are more easily talked of than obtained: as any body, who has tried for them under

difficulties, knows. Moreover, although Lionel had never taken a prominent part in politics, the Verner interest had always been given against the government party, then in power. He did not see his way at all clear before him: and he found that it was to be still further obstructed on another score.

After thinking and planning and plotting till his brain was nearly bewildered, he at length made up his mind to go to London, and see whether anything could be done. With regard to his creditors there, he must lay the state of the case frankly before them, and say: "Will you leave me my liberty, and wait? You will get nothing by putting me in prison, for I have no money of my own, and no friend to come forward and advance it to clear me. Give me time, accord me my liberty, and I will endeavour to pay you off by degrees." It was, at any rate, a straightforward mode of going to work, and Lionel determined to adopt it. Before mentioning it to his wife, he spoke to Lady Verner.

And then occurred the obstruction. Lady Verner, though she did not oppose the plan, declined to take charge of Sibylla, or to retain her in her house during Lionel's absence.

"I could not take her with me," said Lionel. "There would be more objections to it than one. In the first place, I have not the means; in the second—"

He came to an abrupt pause, and turned the words off. He had been about incautiously to say, "She would most likely, once in London, run me into

deeper debt." But Lionel had kept the fact of her having run him into debt at all, a secret in his own breast. Whatever may have been his wife's faults and failings, he did not make it his business to proclaim them to the world. She proclaimed enough herself, to his grievous chagrin, without his helping to do it.

"Listen, Lionel," said Lady Verner. "You know what my feeling always was with regard to your wife. A closer intercourse has not tended to change that feeling, or to lessen my dislike of her. Now you must forgive my saying this; it is but a passing allusion. Stay on with me as long as you like; stay on for ever, if you will, and she shall stay; but if you leave, she must leave. I should be sorry to have her here, even for a week, without you. In fact, I would not."

"It would be quite impossible for me to take her to London," deliberated Lionel. "I can be there alone at a very trifling cost; but a lady involves so much expense. There must be lodgings, which are dear; and living, which is dear; and attendance, and—and—many other sources of outlay."

"And pray, what should you do, allowing that you went alone, without lodgings and living and attendance, and all the rest of it?" asked Lady Verner. "Take a room at one of their model lodging-houses, at half-a-crown a week, and live upon the London air?"

"Not very healthy air for fastidious lungs," observed Lionel with a smile. "I don't quite know how

I should manage for myself, mother; except that I should take care to condense my expenses into the very narrowest nucleus that man ever condensed them yet."

"Not you, Lionel. You were never taught that sort of close economy."

"True," he answered. "But the most efficient of all instructors has come to me now—necessity. I wish you would increase my gratitude and my obligation to you by allowing Sibylla to remain here. In a little time, if I have luck, I may make a home for her in London."

"Lionel, *it cannot be*," was the reply of Lady Verner. And he knew when she spoke in that quiet tone of emphasis, that it could not be. "Why should you go to London?" she resumed. "My opinion is, that you will do no good by going; that it is a wild-goose scheme altogether which you have got in your head. I think I could tell you a better."

"What is yours?"

"Remain contentedly here with me until the return of Colonel Tempest. He may even now be on his road. He will no doubt be able to get you some civil appointment in one of the Presidencies; he has influence here with the people that have to do with India. That will be the best plan, Lionel. You are always wishing you could go abroad. Stay here quietly until he comes; I should like you to stay, and I will put up with your wife."

Some allusion, or allusions, in the words brought the flush to Lionel's cheeks. "I cannot reconcile

it to my conscience, mother, to remain on here, a burthen upon your small income."

"But it is not a burthen, Lionel," she said. "It is rather a help."

"How can that be?" he asked.

"So long as Jan pays."

"So long as Jan pays!" echoed Lionel, in astonishment. "Does Jan—pay?"

"Yes, he does. I thought you knew it? Jan came here the day you arrived—don't you remember it, when he had the pins in his shirt? Decima had invited him to dinner, and he came in ten minutes before it, and called me out of the room here, where I was with Lucy. The first thing he did was to tumble into my flap a roll of bank-notes, which he had been to Heartburg to get. A hundred and forty pounds, it was; the result of his savings since he joined Dr. West in partnership. The next thing he said was, that all his own share of the profits of the practice, he should bring to me to make up for the cost of you and Sibylla. Jan said he had proposed that you should go to him; but Sibylla would not consent to it."

Lionel's veins coursed on with a glow. Jan slaving and working for him!

"I never knew this," he cried.

"I am sure I thought you did," said Lady Verner. "I supposed it to have been a prearranged thing between you and Jan. Lionel," looking up into his face with an expression of care, and lowering her voice, "but for that hundred and forty pounds, I

don't see how I could have gone on. You had been very liberal to me, but somehow debt upon debt seemed to come in, and I was growing quite embarrassed. Jan's money set me partially straight. My dear—as you see you are no 'burthen,' as you call it, you will give up this London scheme, will you not, and remain on?"

"I suppose I must," mechanically answered Lionel, who seemed buried in thought.

He did suppose he must. He was literally without money, and his intention had been to ask the loan of a twenty-pound note from generous Jan, to carry him to London, and keep him there while he turned himself about, and saw what could be done. How could he ask Jan now? There was little doubt that Jan had left himself as void of ready cash as he, Lionel, was. Dr. West's was not a business where patients went and paid their guinea fee, two or three dozen patients a-day. Dr. West (or Jan for him) had to doctor his patients for a year, and send in his modest bill at the end of it, very often waiting for another year before the bill was paid. Sibylla on his hands, and no money, he did not see how he was to get to London.

"But just think of it," resumed Lady Verner. "Jan's savings for nearly three years of practice to amount only to a hundred and forty pounds! I questioned him pretty sharply, asking him what on earth he could have done with his money, and he acknowledged that he had given a good deal away. He said Miss West had borrowed some, the doctor

kept her so short ; then Jan, it seems, forgot to put down the expenses of the horse to the general account, and that had to come out of his pocket. Another thing he acknowledged to having done. When he finds the poor can't conveniently pay their bills, he crosses it off in the book, and furnishes the money himself. He has not common sense, you know, Lionel ; and never had."

Lionel caught up his hat, and went out in the moment's impulse, seeking Jan. Jan was in the surgery alone, making up pills, packing up medicines, answering callers ; doing, in fact, Master Cheese's work. Master Cheese had a head-ache, and was groaning dismally in consequence in an arm-chair, in front of Miss Deb's sitting-room fire, and sipping some hot elder wine, with sippets of toast in it, which he had assured Miss Deb was a sovereign specific, though it might not be generally known, to keep off the sickness.

"Jan," said Lionel, going straight up, and grasping him by the hand ; "what am I to say to you ? I did not know, until ten minutes ago, what it is that you are doing for me."

Jan put down a pill-box he held, and looked at Lionel. "What am I doing for you ?" he asked.

"I speak of this money that I find you have handed to my mother. Of the money you have undertaken to hand to her."

"Law, is that all ?" said Jan, taking up the pill-box again, and biting one of the pills in two to test its quality. "I thought you were going to tell me I

had sent you poison, or something; coming in like that."

"Jan, I can never repay you. The money I may, sometime; I hope I shall: the debt of gratitude, never."

"There's nothing to repay," returned Jan, with composure. "As long as I have meat and drink and clothes, what do I want with extra money? You are heartily welcome to it, Lionel."

"You are working your days away, Jan, and for no benefit to yourself. I am reaping it."

"A man can but work," responded Jan. "I like work, for my part; I wouldn't be without it. If old West came home and said he'd take all the patients for a week, and give me a holiday, I should only set on and pound. "Look here," pointing to the array on the counter. "I have done more work in two hours than Cheese gets through in a week."

Lionel could not help smiling. Jan went on:

"I don't work for the sake of accumulating money, but because work is life's business, and I like work for its own sake. If I got no money by it, I should work. Don't think about the money, Lionel: while it lay in that bank where was the use of it? Better for my mother to have it, than for me to be hoarding it."

"Jan, did it never strike you that it might be well to make some provision for contingencies? Old age, say; or sudden deprivation of strength, through accident or other cause? If you give away all you

might save for yourself, what should you do were the evil day to come?"

Jan looked at his arms. "I am tolerably strong," said he; "feel me. My head's all right, and my limbs are all right. If I should be deprived of strength before my time, I daresay, God, in taking it, would find some means just to keep me from want."

The answer was delivered in the most straightforward simplicity. Lionel looked at him until his eyes grew moist.

"A pretty fellow I should be, to hoard up money while anybody else wanted it!" continued Jan. "You and Sibylla make yourselves comfortable, Lionel, that's all."

They were interrupted by the entrance of John Massingbird and his pipe. John appeared to find his time hang rather heavily on his hands: *he* could not say that work was the business of his life. He might be seen lounging about Deerham at all hours of the day and night, smoking and gossiping. Jan often got honoured with a visit. Mr. Massingbird of Verner's Pride was not a whit altered from Mr. Massingbird of nowhere: John favoured the tap-rooms as much as he had used to favour them.

"The very man I wanted to see!" cried he, giving Lionel a hearty slap on the shoulder. "I want to talk to you a bit on a matter of business. Will you come up to Verner's Pride?"

"When?" asked Lionel.

"This evening, if you will. Come to dinner. Only our two selves."

"Very well," replied Lionel. And he went out of the surgery, leaving John Massingbird talking to his brother.

"On business," John Massingbird had said. Was it to ask him about the mesne profits?—when he could refund them?—to tell him he would be sued, unless he did refund them? Lionel did not know: but he had been expecting John Massingbird to take some such steps.

In going back home, choosing the near cross-field way, as Jan often did, Lionel suddenly came upon Mrs. Peckaby, seated on the stump of a tree, in a very disconsolate fashion. To witness her thus, off the watch for the white animal that might be arriving before her door, surprised Lionel.

"I'm a'most sick of it, sir," she said. "I'm sick to the heart with looking and watching. My brain gets weary and my eyes gets tired. The white quadruple don't come, and Peckaby, he's a-rowing at me everlastin'. I'm come out here for a bit o' peace."

"Don't you think it would be better to give the white donkey up for a bad job, Mrs. Peckaby?"

"Give it up!" she uttered, aghast. "Give up going to New Jerusalem on a white donkey! No, sir, that would be a misfortin' in life!"

Lionel smiled sadly as he left her.

"There are worse misfortunes in life, Mrs. Peckaby, than the not going to New Jerusalem on a white donkey."

CHAPTER XI.

A PROPOSAL.

LIONEL VERNER was seated in the dining-room at Verner's Pride. Not its master. Its master, John Massingbird, was there, opposite to Lionel. They had just dined, and John was filling his short pipe as an accompaniment to his wine. During dinner, he had been regaling Lionel with choice anecdotes of his Australian life, laughing ever: but not a syllable had he broached yet about the "business" he had put forth as the plea for the invitation to Lionel to come. The anecdotes did not raise the social features of that far-off colony in Mr. Verner's estimation. But he laughed with John: laughed as merrily as his heavy heart would allow him.

It was quite a wintry day, telling of the passing autumn. The skies were leaden-grey; the dead leaves rustled on the paths; and the sighing wind swept through the trees with a mournful sound. Void of brightness, of hope, it all looked, as did Lionel Verner's fortunes. But a few short weeks ago he had been in John Massingbird's place, in the very chair that *he* now sat in, never thinking to be removed from it during life. And now!—what a change!

"Why don't you smoke, Lionel?" asked John, setting light to his pipe by the readiest way—that of thrusting it between the bars of the grate. "You did not care to smoke in the old days, I remember."

"I never cared for it," replied Lionel.

"I can tell you that you would have cared for it, had you been knocked about as I have. Tobacco's meat and drink to a fellow at the Diggings: as it is to a sailor and a soldier."

"Not to all soldiers," observed Lionel. "My father never smoked an ounce of tobacco in his life. I have heard them say so. And he saw some service."

"Every man to his liking," returned John Massingbird. "Folks preach about tobacco being an acquired taste! It's all bosh. Babies come into the world with a liking for it, I know. Talking about your father, would you like to have that portrait of him that hangs in the large drawing-room? You can if you like. I'm sure you have more right to it than I."

"Thank you," replied Lionel. "I should very much like it, if you will give it me."

"What a fastidious chap you are, Lionel!" cried John Massingbird, puffing vigorously; for the pipe was turning refractory, and would not keep alight. "There are lots of things you have left behind you here, that I, in your place, should have marched off without asking."

"The things are yours. That portrait of my father belonged to my Uncle Stephen, and he made

no exception in its favour when he willed Verner's Pride, and all it contained, away from me. In point of legal right, I was at liberty to touch nothing, beyond my personal effects."

"Liberty be hanged!" responded John. "You are over fastidious; always were. Your father was the same, I know; can see it in his likeness. I should say, by the look of that, he was too much of a gentleman for a soldier."

Lionel smiled. "Some of our soldiers are the most refined gentlemen on the world's soil."

"I can't tell how they retain their refinement, then, amid the rough and ready of camp life. I know I lost all I had at the Diggings."

Lionel laughed outright at the notion of John Massingbird's losing his refinement at the Diggings. He never had any to lose. John joined in the laugh.

"Lionel, old boy, do you know I always liked you, with all your refinement; and it's a quality that never found great favour with me. I liked you better than I liked poor Fred: and that's the truth."

Lionel made no reply, and John Massingbird smoked for a few minutes in silence. Presently he began again.

"I say, what made you go and marry Sibylla?"

Lionel lifted his eyes. But John Massingbird resumed, before he had time to speak.

"She's not worth a button. Now you need not fly out, old chap. I am not passing my opinion on your wife; wouldn't presume to do such a thing;

but on my cousin. Surely I may find fault with my cousin, if I like ! Why did you marry her ? ”

“ Why does anybody else marry ? ” returned Lionel.

“ But why did you marry *her* ? A sickly, fractious thing ! I saw enough of her in the old days. There ! be quiet ! I have done. If it hadn’t been for her, I’d have asked you to come here to your old home ; you and I should jog along together first-rate. But Sibylla bars it. She may be a model of a wife ; I don’t insinuate to the contrary, take you note, Mr. Verner ; but she’s not exactly a model of temper, and Verner’s Pride wouldn’t be big enough to hold her and me. Would you have taken up your abode with me, had you been a free man ? ”

“ I cannot tell,” replied Lionel. “ It is a question that cannot arise now.”

“ No. Sibylla stops it. What are you going to do with yourself ? ”

“ That I cannot tell. I should like an appointment abroad, if I could get one. I did think of going to London, and looking about me a bit ; but I am not sure that I shall do so just yet.”

“ I say, Lionel,” resumed John Massingbird, sinking his voice, but speaking in a joking sort of way, “ how do you mean to pay your debts ? I hear you have a few.”

“ I have a good many, one way or another.”

“ Wipe them off,” said John.

“ I wish I could wipe them off.”

"There's nothing more easy," returned John, in his free manner. "Get the whitewash brush to work. The insolvent court has got its friendly doors ever open."

The colour came into the face of Lionel. A Verner *there!* He quietly shook his head. "I daresay I shall find a way of paying sometime, if the people will only wait."

"Sibylla helped you to a good part of the score, didn't she? People are saying so. Just like her!"

"When I complain of my wife, it will be quite time enough for other people to begin," said Lionel. "When I married Sibylla, I took her with her virtues and her faults; and I am quite ready to defend both."

"All right. I'd rather you had the right of defending them than I," said incorrigible John. "Look here, Lionel: I got you up here to-day to talk about the estate. Will you take the management of it?"

"Of this estate?" replied Lionel, scarcely understanding.

"Deuce a bit of any other could I offer you. Things are all at sixes and sevens already: they are chaos; they are purgatory. That's our word out yonder, Lionel, to express the ultimatum of badness. Matiss comes and bothers; the tenants, one and another, come and bother; Roy comes and bothers. What with it all, I'm fit to bar the outer doors. Roy, you know, thought I should put him into power again! No, no, Mr. Roy: Fred might

have done it, but I never will. I have paid him well for the services he rendered me: but put him into power—no. Altogether, things are getting into inextricable confusion; I can't look to them, and I want a manager. Will you take it, Lionel? I'll give you five hundred a year."

The mention of the sum quite startled Lionel. It was far more than he should have supposed John Massingbird would offer to any manager. Matiss would do it for a fourth. *Should* he take it?

He sat, twirling his wine-glass in his fingers. There was a soreness of spirit to get over, and it could not be done all in a moment. To become a servant (indeed it was no better) on the land that had once been his; that ought to be his now, by the law of right—a servant to John Massingbird! Could he bend to it? John smoked, and sat watching him.

He thought of the position of his wife; he thought of the encumbrance on his mother; he thought of his brother Jan, and what *he* had done; he thought of his own very unsatisfactory prospects. Was *this* the putting his shoulder to the wheel, as he had resolved to do, thus to hesitate on a quibble of pride? Down, down with his rebellious spirit! Let him be a man in the sight of Heaven!

He turned to John Massingbird, his brow clear, his eye serene. "I will take it, and thank you," he said in a steady, cheerful tone.

"Then let's have some grog on the strength of it," was that gentleman's answer. "Tynn says the

worry nearly took my mother's life out of her during the time she managed the estate; and it would take it out of mine. If I kept it in my own hands, it would go to the dogs in a twelvemonth. And you'd not thank me for that, Lionel. You are the next heir."

"You may take a wife yet."

"A wife for me!" he shouted. "No, thank you. I know the value of 'em too well for that. Give me my liberty, and you may have the wives. Lionel, the office had better be in the study as it used to be: you can come up here of a day. I'll turn the drawing-room into my smoke-shop. If there are any leases or other deeds missing, you must get them drawn out again. I'm glad it's settled."

Lionel declined the grog; but he remained on, talking things over. John Massingbird sat in a cloud of smoke, drinking Lionel's share as well as his own, and listening to the rain, which had begun to patter against the window-panes.

CHAPTER XII.

GOING TO NEW JERUSALEM ON A WHITE DONKEY.

AND now we must pay a visit to Mrs. Peckaby : for great events were happening to her on that night.

When Lionel met her in the day, seated on the stump, all disconsolate, she had thrown out a hint that Mr. Peckaby was not habitually in quite so social a mood as he might be. The fact was, Peckaby's patience had run out : and little wonder, either. The man's meals made ready for him in any careless way, often not made ready at all, and his wife spending her time in sighing, and moaning, and looking out for the white donkey ! You, my readers, may deem this a rather far-fetched episode in the story ; you may deem it next to impossible that any woman should be so ridiculously foolish, or could be so imposed upon : but I am only relating to you the strict truth. The facts occurred precisely as they are being narrated, and not long ago. I have neither added to the story nor taken from it.

Mrs. Peckaby finished out her sitting on the stump under the grey skies. The skies were greyer when she rose to go home. She found on her

arrival that Peckaby had been in to his tea : that is, he had been in, hoping to partake of that social meal; but finding no preparation made for it, he had a little relieved his mind by pouring a pail of water over the kitchen fire, thereby putting the fire out and causing considerable damage to the fire-irons and appurtenances generally, which would cause Mrs. Peckaby some little work to remedy.

"The brute!" she ejaculated, putting her foot into the slop on the floor, and taking a general view of things. "Oh, if I was but off!"

"My patience, what a mess!" exclaimed Polly Dawson, who happened to be going by, and turned in for a gossip. "Whatever have done it?"

"Whatever have done it? why that wretch Peckaby," retorted the aggrieved wife. "Don't you never get married, Polly Dawson, if you want to keep on the right side of the men. They be the worst animals in all creation. Many a poor woman's life has been aggravated out of her."

"If I do get married, I shan't begin the aggravation by wanting to be off to them saints at New Jerusalem," impudently returned Polly Dawson.

Mrs. Peckaby received it meekly. What with the long-continued disappointment, the perpetual "aggravations" of Peckaby, and the prospect of work before her, arising from the gratuitous pail of water, she was feeling unusually cowed down.

"I wish I was a hundred mile off," she cried. "Nobody's fate was never so hard as mine."

"It'll take you a good two hours to red up," ob-

served Polly Dawson. "I'd rather you had to do it nor me."

"I'd see it further—afore it should take me two hours—and Peckaby with it," retorted Mrs. Peckaby, reviving to a touch of temper. "I shall but give it a lick and a promise; just mop up the wet, and dry the grate, and get a bit of fire alight. T'other things may go."

Polly Dawson departed, and Mrs. Peckaby set to her work. By dint of some trouble, she contrived to obtain a cup of tea for herself after awhile, and then she sat on disconsolately as before. Night came on, and she had ample time to indulge her ruminations.

Peckaby had not been in. Mrs. Peckaby concluded he was solacing himself at that social rendezvous, the Plough and Harrow, and would come home in a state of beer. Between nine and ten he entered—hours were early in Deerham—and to Mrs. Peckaby's surprise, he was not only sober, but social.

"It have turned out a pouring wet night," cried he. And the mood was so unwonted, especially after the episode of the wet grate, that Mrs. Peckaby was astonished into answering pleasantly.

"Will ye have some bread and cheese?" asked she.

"I don't mind if I do. Chuff, he gave me a piece of his bread and bacon at eight o'clock, so I ain't over hungry."

Mrs. Peckaby brought forth the loaf and the

cheese, and Peckaby cut himself some and eat it. Then he went up-stairs. She stayed to put the eatables away, raked out the fire, and followed. Peckaby was already in bed. To get into it was not a very ceremonious proceeding with him, as it is not with many others. There was no superfluous attire to throw off, there was no hindering time with ablutions, there were no prayers. Mrs. Peckaby favoured the same convenient mode, and she had just put the candle out, when some noise struck upon her ear.

It came from the road outside. They slept back, the front room having been the one let to Brother Jarrum ; but in those small houses, at that quiet hour, noises in the road were heard as distinctly back as front. There was a sound of talking, and then came a modest knock at Peckaby's door.

Mrs. Peckaby went to the front room, opened the casement, and looked out. To say that her heart leaped into her mouth, would be a most imperfect figure of speech to describe the state of feeling that rushed over her. In the rainy obscurity of the night she could discern something white drawn up to the door, and the figures of two men standing by it. The only wonder was, that she did not leap out ; she might have done it, had the window been large enough.

" Do Susan Peckaby live here ? " inquired a gruff voice, that seemed as if it were muffled.

" Oh, dear good gentlemen, yes ! " she responded, in a tremble of excitement. " Please what is it ? "

"The white donkey's come to take her to New Jerusalem."

With a shrieking cry of joy that might have been heard all the way up Clay Lane, Mrs. Peckaby tore back to her chamber.

"Peckaby," she cried, "Peckaby, the thing's come at last! The blessed animal that's to bear me off. I always said it would."

Peckaby—probably from drowsiness—made no immediate response. Mrs. Peckaby stooped down to the low bed, and shook him well by the shoulder.

"It's the white quadruple, Peckaby, come at last!"

Peckaby growled out something that she was in a state of too great excitement to hear. She lighted the candle; she flung on some of the things she had taken off; she ran back to the front before they were fastened, lest the messengers, brute and human, should have departed, and put her head out at the casement again, all in the utmost fever of agitation.

"A minute or two yet, good gentlemen, please! I'm a'most ready. I'm a waiting to get out my purple gownd."

"All right, missus," was the muffled answer.

The "purple gownd" was kept in this very ex-room of Brother Jarrum's, hid in a safe place between some sheets of newspaper. Had Mrs. Peckaby kept it open to the view of Peckaby, there's no saying what grief the robe might not have come to, ere this. Peckaby, in his tantrums, would not have been likely to spare it. She put it on, and hooked it

down the front, her trembling fingers scarcely able to accomplish it. That it was full loose for her she was prepared to find: she had grown thin with fretting. Then she put on a shawl; next, her bonnet; last some green leather gloves. The shawl was black, with worked coloured corners,—a thin small shawl that hardly covered her shoulders; and the bonnet was a straw, trimmed with pink ribbons—the toilette which had long been prepared.

“Good bye, Peckaby,” said she, going in when she was ready. “You’ve said many a time as you wished I was off, and now you have got your wish. But I don’t want to part nothing but friends.”

“Good bye,” returned Peckaby, in a hearty tone, as he turned himself round on his bed. “Give my love to the saints.”

To find him in this accommodating humour, was more than she had bargained for. A doubt had crossed her sometimes, whether, when the white donkey did come, there might not arise a battle with Peckaby, ere she should get off. This apparently civil feeling on his part awoke a more social one on hers; and a qualm of conscience darted across her, suggesting that she might have made him a better wife had she been so disposed. “He might have shook hands with me,” was her parting thought, as she unlocked the street door.

The donkey was waiting outside with all the patience for which donkeys are renowned. It had been drawn up under a sheltering ledge at a door or two’s distance, to be out of the rain. Its two con-

ductors were muffled up, as befitted the inclemency of the night, something like their voices appeared to have been. Mrs. Peckaby was not in her sober senses sufficiently to ask whether they were brothers from the New Jerusalem, or whether the style of costume they favoured might be the prevailing mode in that fashionable city: if so, it was decidedly more useful than elegant, consisting apparently of hopsacks, doubled over the head and over the back.

“ Ready, missus ? ”

“ I be quite ready,” she answered, in a tremble of delight. “ There ain’t no saddle ! ” she called out, as the donkey was trotted forward.

“ You won’t want a saddle : these New Jerusalem animals bain’t like the ord’nary uns. Jump on him, missus.”

Mrs. Peckaby was so exceedingly tall, that she had not far to jump. She took her seat sideways, settled her gown, and laid hold of the bridle, which one of the men put into her hands. He turned the donkey round, and set it going with a smack ; the other helped by crying “ Gee-ho ! ”

Up Clay Lane she proceeded in triumph. The skies were dark, and the rain came soaking down ; but Mrs. Peckaby’s heart was too warm to dwell on any temporary inconvenience. If a thought crossed her mind that the beauty of the pink ribbons might be marred by the storm, so as somewhat to dim the glory of her entrance into the city and introduction to the saints, she drove it away again. Trouble had no admission in her present frame of mind. The

gentlemen in the hop-sacks continued to attend her ; the one leading the donkey, the other walking behind and cheering the animal on with periodical gee-ho's.

"I suppose as it's a long way, sir ?" asked Mrs. Peckaby, breaking the silence, and addressing the conductor.

"Middlin'," replied he.

"And how do we get over the sea, please, sir?" asked she again.

"The woyage is pervised for, missus," was the short and satisfactory response. "Brother Jarrum took care of that when he sent us."

Her heart went into a glow at the name. And them envious disbelievers in Deerham had cast all sorts of disparaging accusations to the Brother, openly expressing their opinion that he had gone off purposely without her, and that she'd never hear of him again !

Arrived at the top of Clay Lane, the road was crossed, and the donkey was led down a turning towards the lands of Sir Rufus Hautley. It may have occurred to Mrs. Peckaby to wonder that the highway was not taken, instead of an unfrequented bye-path that only led to fields and a wood ; but, if so, she said nothing. Had the white donkey taken her to a gravel pit, and pitched headlong in with her, she would have deemed, in her blind faith, that it was the right road to New Jerusalem.

A long way it was, over those wet fields. If the brothers and the donkey partook of the saintly

nature of the inhabitants of Salt Lake City, possibly they did not find it a weary one. Mrs. Peckaby certainly did not. She was rapt in a glowing vision of the honours and delights that would welcome her at her journey's end;—so rapt, that she and the donkey had been for some little time in one of the narrow paths of the wood before she missed her two conductors.

It caused Mrs. Peckaby to pull the bridle, and cry “Wo-ho!” to the donkey. She had an idea that they might have struck into the wrong path, for this one appeared to be getting narrower and narrower. The wood was intersected with paths, but only a few of them led right through it. She pulled up, and turned her head the way she had come, but was unable to distinguish anything, save that she was in the heart of the wood.

“Be you behind, gentlemen?” she called out.

There was no reply. Mrs. Peckaby waited a bit, thinking they might have lagged unwittingly, and then called out again, with the like result.

“It’s very curious!” thought Mrs. Peckaby.

She was certainly in a dilemma. Without her conductors, she knew no more how to get to New Jerusalem than she did how to get to the new moon. She might find her way through the wood, by one path or another; but, once on the other side, she had no idea which road to turn the donkey to—north, south, east, or west. She thought she would go back and look after them.

But there was some difficulty in doing this. The

path had grown so narrow that the donkey could not easily be turned. She slipped off him, tied the bridle to a tree, and ran back as fast as the obscurity of the path allowed her, calling out to the gentlemen.

The more she ran and the more she called, the less did there appear to be anybody to respond to it. Utterly at a nonplus, she at length returned to the donkey—that is, to the spot, so far as she could judge, where she had left it. But the donkey was gone.

Was Mrs. Peckaby awake or asleep? Was the past blissful dream—when she was being borne in triumph to New Jerusalem—only an imaginary one? Was her present predicament real? Which *was* imagination and which was real? For the last hour she had been enjoying the realisation of all her hopes; now she seemed no nearer their fruition than she had been a year ago. The white donkey was gone, the conducting Brothers were gone, and she was alone in the middle of a wood, two miles from home, on a wet night. Mrs. Peckaby had heard of enchantments, and began to think she must have been subjected to something of the sort.

She rubbed her eyes; she pinched her arms. Was she in her senses or not? Sure never was such a situation heard of! The cup of hope presented palpably to her lips, only to vanish again—she could not tell how—and leave no sign. A very disagreeable doubt—not yet a suspicion—began to

dawn over Mrs. Peckaby. Had she been made the subject of a practical joke?

She might have flung the doubt from her, but for a distant sound that came faintly on her ears—the sound of covert laughter. Her doubt turned to conviction. Her face became hot; her heart, but for the anger at it, would have grown sick with the disappointment. Her conductors and the donkey were retreating, having played their joke out! Two certainties forced themselves upon her mind. One, that Peckaby and his friends had planned it; she felt sure now that the biggest of the “Brothers” had been nobody but Chuff, the blacksmith: the other certainty was, that she should never be sent for to New Jerusalem in any other way. Why it should have been, Mrs. Peckaby could not have told, then or afterwards; but the positive conviction that Brother Jarrum *had* been false, that the story of sending for her on a white donkey had only been invented to keep her quiet, fixed itself in her mind in that moment in the lonely wood. She sunk down amidst the trees and sobbed bitterly.

But, all the tears combined that the world ever shed, could not bring her nearer to New Jerusalem, or make her present situation better. After awhile she had the sense to remember that. She rose from the ground, turned her gown up over her shoulders, found her way out of the wood, and set off on her walk back again in a very humble frame of mind, arriving home as the clock was striking two.

She could make nobody hear. She knocked at the door, she knocked at the window, gently at first; then louder; she called and called, but there came no answer. Some of the neighbours, aroused by the unwonted disturbance, came peeping at their windows. At length Peckaby opened his; thrusting his head out at the very casement from which Mrs. Peckaby had beheld the deceitful vision earlier in the night.

"Who's there?" called out Peckaby.

"It's me, Peckaby," was the answer, delivered in a forlorn tone. "Come down and open the door."

"Who's 'me'?" asked Peckaby.

"It's me," repeated Mrs. Peckaby, looking up.

And what with her height and the low casement, their faces were really not many inches apart; but yet Peckaby appeared not to know her.

"You be off, will you!" retorted he. "A pretty thing, if tramps be to come to decent folks' doors and knock 'em up like this. Who's door did you take it for?"

"It's me!" screamed Mrs. Peckaby. "Don't you know me? Come and undo the door, and let me come in. I be sopping."

"Know you! How should I know you? Who be you?"

"Good heavens, Peckaby! you must know me. Ain't I your wife?"

"My wife! Not a bit on't. You needn't come here with that gammon, missis, whoever you be."

My wife's gone off to New Jerusalem on a white donkey."

He slammed-to the casement. Mrs. Peckaby, what with the rain and what with the disappointment, burst into tears. In the same moment, sundry other casements opened, and all the heads in the vicinity—including the blacksmith Chuff's, and Mrs. Chuff's—were thrust out to condole with their neighbour, Mrs. Peckaby.

"Had she been and come back a'ready?" "Did she get tired of the saints so soon as this—or did they get tired of her?" "What sort of a city, was it?" "Which was most plentiful—geese or sage?" "How many wives, besides herself, had the gentleman that *she* chose?" "Who took care of the babies?" "Did they have many public dances?" "Was veils for the bonnets all the go?" "Was it a paradise or warn't it?" "And how was Brother Jarrum?"

Amongst the many questions asked, those came prominently tingling on the ears of the unhappy Mrs. Peckaby. Too completely prostrate with events to retort, she suddenly let drop her gown, that she had kept so carefully turned, and clapped both her hands upon her face. Then came a real, genuine question from the next door casement—Mrs. Green's.

"Ain't that your plum-coloured gownd? What's come to it?"

Mrs. Peckaby, somewhat aroused, looked at the gown in haste. What *had* come to it? Patches of

dead-white, looking not unlike paint, covered it about on all sides, especially behind. The shawl had caught some white, too, and the green leather gloves looked, inside, as though they had had a coat of whitewash put on them. Her beautiful gown ! laid by so long !—what on earth had ruined it like that ?

Chuff, the blacksmith, gave a great grin from his window. “ Sure that there donkey never was painted down white ! ” quoth he.

That it had been painted down white, and with exceedingly wet paint too, there could be little doubt. Some poor donkey humble in his coat of grey, converted into a fine white animal for the occasion, by Peckaby and Chuff and their cronies. Mrs. Peckaby shrieked and sobbed with mortification, and drummed frantically on her house door. A chorus of laughter echoed from all sides, and Peckaby’s casement flew open again.

“ Will you stop that there knocking, then ? ” roared Peckaby. “ Disturbing a man’s night’s rest.”

“ I *will* come in then, Peckaby,” she stormed, plucking up a little spirit in her desperation. “ I be your wife, you know I be, and I will come in.”

“ My good woman, what’s took you ? ” cried Peckaby, in a tone of compassionating suavity. “ You ain’t no wife of mine. My wife’s miles on her road by this time. She’s off to New Jerusalem on a white donkey.”

A new actor came up to the scene. No other than Jan Verner. Jan had been sitting up with some

poor patient, and was now going home. To describe his surprise when he saw the windows alive with nightcapped heads, and Mrs. Peckaby in her dripping discomfort, in her paint, in her state altogether, outward and inward, would be a long task. Peckaby himself undertook the explanation, in which he was aided by Chuff; and Jan sat himself down on the public pump, and laughed till he was hoarse.

"Come, Peckaby, you'll let her in," cried he, before he went away.

"Let her in!" echoed Peckaby. "That would be a go, that would! What 'ud the saints say? They'd be for prosecuting of her for bigamy. If she's gone over to them, sir, she can't belong legal to me."

Jan laughed so that he had to hold his sides, and Mrs. Peckaby shrieked and sobbed. Chuff began calling out that the best remedy for white paint was turpentine.

"Come along, Peckaby, and open the door," said Jan, rising. "She'll catch an illness if she stops here in her wet clothes, and I shall have a month's work, attending on her. Come!"

"Well, sir, to oblige you, I will," returned the man. "But let me ever catch her snivelling after them saints again, that's all! They should have her if they liked; I'd not."

"You hear, Mrs. Peckaby," said Jan in her ear. "I'd let the saints alone for the future, if I were you."

"I mean to, sir," she meekly answered, between her sobs.

Peckaby in his shirt and nightcap, opened the door, and she bounded in. The casements closed to the chorus of subsiding laughter, and the echoes of Jan's footsteps died away in the distance.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXPLOSION OF SIBYLLA'S.

SIBYLLA VERNER sat at the window of her sitting-room in the evening twilight: a cold evening in early winter. Sibylla was in an explosive temper. It was nothing unusual for her to be in an explosive temper now; but she was in a worse than customary this evening. Sibylla felt the difference between Verner's Pride and Deerham Court. She lived but in excitement; she cared but for gaiety. In removing to Deerham Court she had gone readily, believing that she should there find a large portion of the gaiety she had been accustomed to at Verner's Pride; that she should, at any rate, be living with the appliances of wealth about her, and should go out a great deal with Lady Verner. She had not bargained for Lady Verner's establishment being reduced to simplicity and quietness, for her laying down her carriage and discharging her men servants and selling her horses and living again the life of a retired gentlewoman. Yet all these changes had come to pass, and Sibylla's inward spirit turned restive. She had everything that any reasonable mind could possibly desire, every comfort: but quiet comfort and Sibylla's taste did not accord. Her husband was out a great deal at

Verner's Pride and on the estate. As he had resolved to do, over John Massingbird's dinner-table, so he was doing—putting his shoulder to the wheel. He had never looked after things as he was looking now. To be the master of Verner's Pride was one thing; to be the hired manager of Verner's Pride was another: and Lionel found every hour of his time occupied. His was no eye-service; his conscience was engaged in his work and he did it efficiently.

Sibylla still sat at the window, looking out into the twilight. Decima stood near the fire in a thoughtful mood. Lucy was down stairs in the drawing-room at the piano. They could hear the faint echo of her soft playing as they sat there in silence. Sibylla was in no humour to talk: she had repulsed Decima rudely—or it may rather be said fractiously—when the latter had ventured on conversation. Lady Verner had gone out to dinner. The Countess of Elmsley had been there that day, and she had asked Lady Verner to go over in the evening and take a friendly dinner with her. “Bring any of them that you like with you,” had been her careless words in parting. But Lady Verner had not chosen to take “any of them;” she had dressed and driven off in the hired fly alone: and this it was that was exciting the anger of Sibylla. She thought Lady Verner might have taken her.

Lucy came in and knelt down on the rug before the fire, half shivering. “I am so cold!” she said. “Do you know what I did, Decima? I let the fire

go out. Sometime after Lady Verner went up to dress, I turned round and found the fire was out. My hands are quite numbed."

" You have gone on playing there without a fire!" cried Decima.

" I shall be warm again directly," said Lucy, cheerily. " As I passed through the hall, the reflection of the blaze came out of the dining-room. We shall get warm there. Is your head still aching, Mrs. Verner ? "

" It is always aching," snapped Sibylla.

Lucy, kind and gentle in spirit, unretorting, ever considerate for the misfortunes which had come upon Mrs. Verner, went to her side. " Shall I get you a little of your aromatic vinegar?" she asked.

" You need not trouble to get anything for me," was the ungracious answer.

Lucy, thus repulsed, stood in silence at the window. The window on this side of the house, overlooked the road which led to Sir Rufus Hautley's. A carriage, apparently closely shut up, so far as she could see in the dusk, its coachman and footman attending it, was bowling rapidly down towards the village.

" There's Sir Rufus Hautley's carriage," said Lucy. " I suppose he is going out to dinner."

Decima drew to the window and looked out. The carriage came sweeping round the point, and turned on its road to the village, as they supposed. In the still silence of the room, they could hear its wheels on the frosty road, after they lost sight of it : could

hear it bowl before their house and—pull up at the gates.

"It has stopped here!" exclaimed Lucy.

Decima moved quietly back to the fire and sat down. A fancy arose to Lucy that she, Decima, had turned unusually pale. Was it so?—or was it fancy? If it was fancy, why should the fancy have arisen? Ghastly pale her face certainly looked, as the blaze played upon it.

A few minutes, and one of the servants came in, handing a note to Decima.

"Bring lights," said Decima, in a low tone.

The lights were brought: and then Decima's agitation was apparent. Her hands shook as she broke the seal of the letter. Lucy gazed in surprise; Sibylla, somewhat aroused from her own grievances, in curiosity.

"Desire the carriage to wait," said Decima.

"It is waiting, Miss Decima. The servants said they had orders."

Decima crushed the note into her pocket as well as her shaking fingers would allow her, and left the room. What could have occurred, thus to agitate calm and stately Decima? Before Lucy and Mrs. Verner had recovered their surprise she was back again, dressed to go out.

"I am sorry to leave you so abruptly, as mamma is not here," she said. "I dare say Lionel will be in to dinner. If not, you must for once entertain each other."

"But where are you going?" cried Mrs. Verner.

"To Sir Rufus Hautley's. He wishes to see me."

"What does he want with you?" continued Sibylla.

"I do not know," replied Decima.

She quitted the room and went down to the carriage, which had waited for her. Mrs. Verner and Lucy heard it drive away again as quickly as it had driven up. As it turned the corner and pursued its way up the road, past the window they were looking from, but at some distance from it, they fancied they saw the form of Decima inside, looking out at them.

"Sir Rufus is taken ill," said old Catherine to them, by way of news. "The servants say that it's feared he won't live through the night. Mr. Jan is there, and Dr. Hayes."

"But what can he want with Miss Verner?" reiterated Sibylla.

Catherine shook her head. She had not the remotest idea.

Lionel Verner did not come in for dinner, and they descended to it without him. His non-appearance was no improvement to the temper of his wife. It had occurred lately that Lionel did not always get home to dinner. Sometimes, when detained at Verner's Pride, he would take it with John Massingbird; if out on the estate, and unable to reach home in time, he would eat something when he came in. Her fractious state of mind did not tend to soothe the headache she had complained of earlier in the day. Every half-hour that passed without her hus-

band's entrance, made her worse in all ways, head and temper ; and about nine o'clock she went up to her sitting-room and lay down on the sofa, saying that her temples were splitting.

Lucy followed her. Lucy thought she must really be ill. She could not understand that anyone should be so fractious, except from wearing pain. "I will bathe your temples," she gently said.

Sibylla did not appear to care whether her temples were bathed or not. Lucy got some water in a basin and two thin handkerchiefs, wringing out one and placing it on Mrs. Verner's head and forehead, kneeling to her task. That her temples were throbbing and her head hot, there was no question : the handkerchief was no sooner on, than it was warm ; and Lucy had to exchange it for the other.

"It is Lionel's fault," suddenly burst forth Sibylla.

"His fault?" returned Lucy. "How can it be his fault?"

"What business has he to stop out?"

"But if he cannot help it?" returned Lucy. "The other evening, don't you remember, Mr. Verner said when he came in, that he could not help being late sometimes now?"

"*You* need not defend him," said Sibylla. "It seems to me that you are all ready to take his part against me."

Lucy made no reply. An assertion more unfounded could not be spoken. At that moment the

step of Lionel was heard on the stairs. He came in, looked jaded and tired.

"Up here this evening!" he exclaimed, laying down a paper or parchment which he had in his hand. "Catherine says my mother and Decima are out. Why, Sibylla, what is the matter?"

Sibylla dashed the handkerchief off her brow as he advanced to her, and rose up, speaking vehemently. The sight of her husband appeared to have brought the climax to her temper.

"Where have you been? Why were you not in to dinner?"

"I could not get home in time. I have been detained."

"It is false," she retorted, her blue eyes flashing fire. "Business, business! it is always your excuse now! You stay out for no good purpose."

The outbreak startled Lucy. She backed a few paces, looking scared.

"Sibylla!" was all the amazed reply returned by Lionel.

"You leave me here, hour after hour, to solitude and tears, while you are out, taking your pleasure! I have all the endurance of our position, and you the enjoyment."

He battled for a moment with his rising feelings; battled for calmness, for forbearance, for strength to bear. There were moments when he was tempted to answer her in her own spirit.

"Pleasure and I have not been very close friends of late, Sibylla," he gravely said. "None can know

that, better than you. My horse fell lame, and I have been leading him these last two hours. I have now to go to Verner's Pride. Something has arisen on which I must see Mr. Massingbird."

"It is false, it is false," reiterated Sibylla. "You are not going to Verner's Pride; you are not going to see Mr. Massingbird. You best know where you are going; but it is not there. It is the old story of Rachel Frost over again."

The words confounded Lionel: both that they were inexplicable, and spoken in passion so vehement.

"What do you say about Rachel Frost?" he asked.

"You know what I say, and what I mean. When Deerham looked far and near for the man who did the injury to Rachel, they little thought they might have found him in Lionel Verner. Lucy Tempest, it is true. He——"

But Lionel had turned imperatively to Lucy, drawing her to the door, which he opened. It was no place for her, a discussion such as this.

"Will you be so kind as to go down and make me a cup of tea, Lucy?" he said, in a wonderfully calm tone, considering the provocation he was receiving. Then he closed the door on Lucy, and turned to his wife.

"Sibylla, allow me to request, nay, to insist, that when you have fault to find, or reproach to cast to me, you choose a moment when we are alone. If you have no care for what may be due to me and to

yourself, you will do well to bear in mind that something is due to others. Now then, tell me what you mean about Rachel Frost."

"I won't," said Sibylla. "You are killing me," and she burst into tears.

Oh, it was weary work!—weary work for him. Such a wife as this!

"In what way am I killing you?"

"Why do you leave me so much alone?"

"I have undertaken work, and I must do it. But, as to leaving you alone, when I am with you, you scarcely ever give me a civil word."

"You are leaving me now—you are wanting to go to Verner's Pride to-night," she reiterated with strange inconsistency, considering that she had just insinuated he did *not* want to go there.

"I must go there, Sibylla. I have told you why: and I have told you truth. Again I ask you what you meant about Rachel Frost."

Sibylla flung up her hands petulantly. "I won't tell you, I say. And you can't make me. I wish, I *wish* Fred had not died!"

She turned round on the sofa and buried her face in the cushions. Lionel, true to the line of conduct he had carved out for himself, to give her all possible token of respect and affection ever, whatever might be her provocation,—and all the more true to it from the very consciousness that the love of his inmost heart grew less hers, more another's, day by day, bent over her and spoke kindly. She flung back her hand in a repelling manner towards him,

and maintained an obstinate silence. Lionel, sick and weary, at length withdrew, taking up the parchment.

How sick and weary, none, save himself, could know. Lucy Tempest had the tea before her, apparently ready, when he looked into the drawing-room.

"I am going on now to Verner's Pride, Lucy. You can tell my mother so, should she ask after me when she returns. I may be late."

"But you will take some tea, first?" cried Lucy, in a hasty tone. "You asked me to make it for you."

He knew he had:—asked her as an excuse to get her from the room.

"I don't care for it," he wearily answered.

"I am sure you are tired," said Lucy. "When did you dine?"

"I have not dined. I have taken nothing since I left home this morning."

"Oh!" She was hastening to the bell. Lionel stopped her, laying his hand upon her arm.

"I could not eat it, Lucy. Just one cup of tea, if you will."

She returned to the table, poured out the cup of tea, and he drank it standing.

"Shall I take Mrs. Verner up a cup?" asked Lucy. "Will she drink it, do you think?"

"Thank you, Lucy. It may do her head good. I think it aches much to-night."

He turned, and departed. Lucy noticed that he

had left the parchment behind him, and ran after him with it. Catching him as he was about to close the hall-door. She knew that all such business-looking papers went up to Verner's Pride.

"Did you mean to leave it? Or have you forgotten it?"

He had forgotten it. He took it from her, retaining her hand for a moment. "*Lucy, you* will not misjudge me?" he said, in a strange tone of pain.

Lucy looked up at him with a bright smile and a very emphatic shake of the head. She knew by instinct that he alluded to the accusation of his wife, touching Rachel Frost. Lucy misjudge *him!*

"You should have waited to eat some dinner," she gaily said. "Take care you don't faint by the way, as that sick patient of Jan's did, the other morning."

Lionel went on. At any rate there was peace outside, if not within: the peace of outward calm. He lifted his hat; he bared his brow, aching with its weight of trouble, to the clear night air; he wondered whether he should have, so to bear, for his whole long life. At the moment of passing the outer gates, the carriage of Sir Rufus Hautley drew up, bearing Decima.

Lionel waited to receive her. He helped her out, and gave her his arm to the hall-door. Decima walked with her head down.

"You are silent, Decima. Are you sad?"

"Yes," she answered. "Sir Rufus is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Lionel, in very astonishment, for he had heard nothing of the sudden illness.

"It is so," she replied, breaking into sobs. "Spasms at the heart, they say. Jan and Dr. Hayes were there, but they could not save him."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

DEBORAH and Amilly West were sitting over the fire in the growing dusk of a February evening. Their sewing lay on the table: some home dresses they were making for themselves, for they had never too much superfluous cash for dress-makers, with fashionable patterns and fashionable prices. It had grown too dark to work, and they had turned to the fire for a chat, before the tea came in, and the gas was lighted.

"I tell you, Amilly, it is of no use playing at concealment, or trying to suppress the truth," Deborah was saying. "She is as surely going as that the other two went: as sure as sure can be. I have always felt that she would go. Mr. Lionel was talking to me only yesterday. He was not satisfied with his brother: at least, he thought it as well to act as though he were not satisfied with him: and he was about to ask Dr. Hayes——"

Her voice died away. Master Cheese had come in with a doleful face.

"Miss Deb, I'm sent up to Deerham Hall. There's a bothering note come from Miss Hautley to Jan, about one of the servants, and he says I am to go up and see what it is."

"Well?" returned Miss Deb, wondering why Master Cheese should come in to give the information to her. "You couldn't expect Mr. Jan to go up, after being out all day, as he has."

"Folks are sure to go and fall ill at the most untoward hour of the twenty-four," grumbled Master Cheese. "I was just looking for a good tea. I feel as empty as possible, after my short dinner. I wish——"

"Short dinner!" echoed Miss Deb in amazement; at least, it would have been in amazement, but that she was accustomed to these little episodes from the young gentleman. "We had a beautiful piece of roast beef; and I'm sure you eat as much as you chose!"

"There was no pudding or pie," resentfully retorted Master Cheese. "I have felt all the afternoon just as if I should sink: and I couldn't get out to buy anything for myself, because Jan never came in, and the boy stopped out. I wish, Miss Deb, you'd give me a thick piece of bread-and-jam, as I have to go off without my tea."

"The fact is, Master Cheese, you have the jam so often, in one way or another, that there's very little left. It will not last the season out."

"The green gooseberries 'll be coming on, Miss Deb," was Master Cheese's insinuating reply. "And there's always apples, you know. With plenty of lemon and a clove or two, apples make as good a pudding as anything else."

Miss Deb, always good-natured, went to get him

what he had asked for, and Master Cheese took his seat in front of the fire, and toasted his toes.

"There was a great mistake made when you were put to a surgeon," said Miss Amilly, laughing. "You should have gone apprentice to a pastrycook."

"She's a regular fidgetty old woman, that Miss Hautley," broke out Master Cheese with temper, passing over Miss Amilly's remark. "It's not two months yet that she has been at the Hall, and she has had one or the other of us up six times at least. I wonder what business she had to come to it? The Hall wouldn't have run away before Sir Edmund could get home."

Miss Deb came back with the bread-and-jam; a good thick slice, as the gentleman had requested. To look at him eating, one would think he had had nothing for a week. It disappeared in no time, and Master Cheese went out sucking his fingers and his lips. Deborah West folded up the work, and put things straight generally in the room. Then she sat down again, drawing her chair to the side of the fire.

"I do think that Cheese has got a wolf inside him," cried Amilly with a laugh.

"He is a great gourmand. He said this morning —" began Miss Deb, and then she stopped.

Finding what she was about to say thus brought to an abrupt conclusion, Amilly West looked at her sister. Miss Deb's attention was riveted on the room-door. Her mouth was open, her eyes seemed starting from her head with a fixed stare, and her countenance was growing white. Amilly turned her

eyes hastily to the same direction, and saw a dark, obscure form filling up the door-way.

Not obscure for long. Amilly, more impulsive than her sister, rose up with a shriek, and darted forward with outstretched arms of welcome; Deborah followed, stretching out hers.

“My dear father!”

It was no other than Dr. West. He gave them each a cool kiss, walked to the fire and sat down, bidding them not smother him. For some little while they could not get over their surprise or believe their senses. They knew nothing of his intention to return, and had deemed him hundreds of miles away. Question after question they showered down upon him, the result of their amazement. He answered just as much as he chose. He had only come home for a day or so, he said, and did not care that it should be known he was there, to be tormented with a shoal of callers.

“Where's Mr. Jan? asked he.

“In the surgery,” said Deborah.

“Is he by himself?”

“Yes, dear papa. Master Cheese has just gone up to Deerham Hall, and the boy is out.”

Dr. West rose, and made his way to the surgery. The surgery was empty. But the light of a fire from the half-opened door, led him to Jan's bedroom. It was a room that would persist in remaining obstinately damp, and Jan, albeit not over careful of himself, judged it well to have an occasional fire lighted. The room, seen by this

light, looked comfortable. The small, low iron bed stood in the far corner: in the opposite corner the bureau, as in Dr. West's time, the door opening to the garden (never used now) between them, at the end of the room. The window was on the side opposite the fire, a table in the middle. Jan was then occupied in stirring the fire into a blaze, and its cheerful light flickered on every part of the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Jan."

Jan turned round, poker in hand, and stared amiably. "Law!" cried he. "Who'd have thought it?"

The old word; the word he had learnt at school —law. It was Jan's favourite mode of expressing surprise still, and Lady Verner never could break him of it. He shook hands cordially with Dr. West.

The doctor shut the door, slipping the bolt, and sat down to the fire. Jan cleared a space on the table, which was covered with jars and glass vases, cylinders, and other apparatus, seemingly for chemical purposes, and took his seat there.

The doctor had taken a run home, "making a morning call, as it might be metaphorically observed," he said to Jan. Just to have a sight of home faces, and hear a little home news. Would Mr. Jan recite to him somewhat of the latter?

Jan did so: touching upon all he could recollect. From John Massingbird's return to Verner's Pride, and the consequent turning out of Mr. Verner and his wife, down to the death of Sir Rufus Hautley:

not forgetting the pranks played by the "ghost," and the foiled expedition of Mrs. Peckaby to New Jerusalem. Some of these items of intelligence the doctor had heard before, for Jan periodically wrote to him. The doctor looked taller, and stouter, and redder than ever, and as he leaned thoughtfully forward, and the crimson blaze played upon his face, Jan thought how like he was growing to his sister, the late Mrs. Verner.

"Mr. Jan," said the doctor, "it is not right that my nephew, John Massingbird, should enjoy Verner's Pride."

"Of course it's not," answered Jan. "Only things don't go by rights always, you know. It's but seldom they do."

"He ought to give it up to Mr. Verner."

"So I told him," said Jan. "*I* should, in his place."

"What did he say?"

"Say? Laughed at me, and called me green."

Dr. West sat thoughtfully pulling his great dark whiskers. Dark as they were, they had yet a tinge of red in the fire-light. "It was a curious thing; a very curious thing, that both brothers should die, as was supposed, in Australia," said he. "Better—as things have turned out—that Fred should have turned up afterwards, than John."

"I don't know that," spoke Jan, with his accustomed truth-telling freedom. "The pair were not good for much, but John was the best of them."

"I was thinking of Sibylla," candidly admitted the doctor. "It would have been better for her."

Jan opened his eyes considerably.

"Better for her!—for it to turn out that she had two husbands living? That's logic, that is."

"Dear me, to be sure!" cried the doctor. "I was not thinking of that phase of the affair, Mr. Jan. Is she in spirits?"

"Who? Sibylla? She's fretting herself into her grave."

Dr. West turned his head with a start. "What at? The loss of Verner's Pride?"

"Well, I don't know," said Jan, ever plain-spoken. "She puzzles me. When she was at Verner's Pride, she never seemed satisfied: she was perpetually hankering after excitement—didn't seem to care for Lionel, or for anybody else, and kept the house full of people from top to bottom. She has a restless, dissatisfied temper, and it keeps her on the worry. Folks with such tempers know no peace, and let nobody else know any that's about them. A nice life she leads Lionel! Not that *he'd* drop a hint of it. He'd cut out his tongue before he'd speak a word against his wife: he'd rather make her out to be an angel."

"Are they pretty comfortably off for money?" inquired Dr. West, after a pause. "I suppose Mr. Verner must have managed to feather his nest a little, before leaving?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Jan. "He was over head and ears in debt. Sibylla helped him to a

good portion of it. She went the pace. John Massingbird waives the question of the mesne profits, or Lionel would be in worse embarrassment than he is."

Dr. West looked crestfallen. "What do they live on?" he asked. "Does Lady Verner keep them? She can't have too much for herself now."

"Oh! it's managed somehow," said Jan.

Dr. West sat for some time in ruminating silence; pulling his whiskers as before, running his hands through his hair, the large clear blue sapphire ring, which he always wore on his finger, conspicuous. Jan swayed his legs about, and waited to afford any further information. Presently the doctor turned to him, a charming expression of open confidence on his countenance.

"Mr. Jan, I am in great hopes that you will do me a little favour. I have temporary need of a trifle of pecuniary aid—some slight debts which have grown upon me abroad," he added, carelessly, with a short cough—"and, knowing your good heart, I have resolved to apply to you. If you can oblige me with a couple of hundred pounds or so, I'll give you my acknowledgment, and return it punctually as soon as I am able."

"I'd let you have it with all the pleasure in life, if I had got it," heartily replied Jan. "But I have not."

"My dear Mr. Jan! Not got it! You must have quite a nice little nest of savings laid by in the bank! I know you never spend a shilling on yourself."

"All I had in the bank, and what I have drawn since, has been handed to my mother. I wanted Lionel and Sibylla to come here : I and Miss Deb arranged it all; and in that case I should have given the money to Miss Deb. But Sibylla refused ; she would not come here, she would not go anywhere but to Lady Verner's. So I handed the money to my mother."

The confession appeared to put the doctor out considerably. "How very imprudent, Mr. Jan ! To give away all you possessed, leaving nothing for yourself ! I never heard of such a thing !"

"Lionel and his wife were turned out of everything, and had nobody to look to. I don't see that I could have put the money to better use," stoutly returned Jan. "It was not much, there's such a lot of the Clay Lane folks always wanting things when they are ill. And Miss Deb, she had had something. You keep her so short, doctor."

"But you pay her the sum that was agreed upon for housekeeping ?" said Dr. West.

"What should hinder me ?" returned Jan. "Of course I do. But she cannot make both ends meet, she says, and then she has to come to me. I'm willing: only I can't give money away and put it by, you see."

Dr. West probably did see it. He saw beyond doubt, that all hope of ready money from easy Jan was gone—from the simple fact that Jan's coffers were just now empty. The fact did not afford him satisfaction.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Jan," said he, brightening up, "you shall give me your signature to a little bill—a bill at two months, let us say. It will be the same as money."

"Can't," said Jan.

"You *can't!*" replied Dr. West.

"No!" said Jan, resolutely. "I'd give away all I had in hand to give, and welcome; but I'd never sign bills. A doctor has no business with 'em. Don't you remember what they did for Jones at Bartholomew's?"

"I don't remember Jones at Bartholomew's," frigidly returned the doctor.

"No! Why, what's gone with your memory?" innocently asked Jan. "If you think a bit, you'll recollect about him, and what his end was. Bills did it; the signing of bills to oblige some friend. I'll never sign a bill, doctor. I wouldn't do it for my own mother."

Thus the doctor's expectations were put a final end to, so far as Jan went—and very certain expectations they had, no doubt, been. As to Jan, a thought may have crossed him that the doctor and his daughter Sibylla appeared to have the same propensity for getting out of money. Dr. West recovered his equanimity, and magnanimously waived away the affair as a trifle not worth dwelling on.

"How does Cheese get on?" he asked.

"First rate—in the eating line," replied Jan.

"Have you got him out of his idleness yet?"

"It would take a more clever man, than I, to do that, doctor. It's constitutional. When he goes up to London, in the autumn, I shall take an assistant: unless you should be coming home yourself."

"I have no intention of it at present, Mr. Jan. Am I to understand you that Sibylla has serious symptoms of disease?"

"There's no doubt of it," said Jan. "You always prophesied it for her, you know. When she was at Verner's Pride she was continually ailing: not a week passed but I was called in to attend her. She was so imprudent, too—she *would* be. Going out and getting her feet wet; sitting up half the night. We tried to bring her to reason; but it was of no use. She defied Lionel; she would not listen to me—as well speak to a post."

"Why should she defy her husband? Are they on bad terms?"

"They are on as good terms as any man and wife could be, Sibylla being the wife," was Jan's rejoinder. "You know something of her temper and disposition, doctor—it is of no use to mince matters—you remember how it had used to be with her here at home. Lionel's a husband in a thousand. How he can possibly put up with her, and be always patient and kind, puzzles me more than any problem ever did in Euclid. If Fred had lived—why, he'd have broken her spirit or her heart, long before this."

Dr. West rose and stretched himself. The

failings of Sibylla were not a pleasant topic, thus openly mentioned by Jan; but none knew better than the doctor how true were the grounds on which he spoke. None knew better, either, that disease for her was to be feared.

"Her sisters went off about this age, or a little later," he said, musingly. "I could not save them."

"And Sibylla's as surely going after them, doctor, as that I am here," returned Jan. "Lionel intends to call in Dr. Hayes to her."

"Since when has she been so ill?"

"Not since any time in particular. There appears to be no real illness yet: only symptoms. She coughs, and gets as thin as a skeleton. Sometimes I think, if she could call up a cheerful temper, she'd keep well. You will see what you think of her."

The doctor walked towards the bureau at the far corner. "Have you ever opened it, Mr. Jan?"

"It's not likely," said Jan. "Didn't you tell me not to open it? Your own papers are in it, and you hold the key."

"It's not inconvenient to your room, my retaining it, I hope?" asked the doctor. "I don't know where else I should put my papers."

"Not a bit of it," said Jan. "Have another in here as well, if you like. It's safe here."

"Do you know, Mr. Jan, I feel as if I'd rather sleep in your little bed to-night than in-doors," said the doctor, looking at Jan's bed. "The room seems like an old friend to me: I feel at home in it."

"Sleep in it, if you like," returned Jan, in his easy good nature. "Miss Deb can put me into some room or other. I say, doctor, it's past tea-time. Wouldn't you like some refreshment?"

"I had a good dinner on my road," replied Dr. West: which Jan might have guessed, for Dr. West was quite sure to take care of himself. "We will go in, if you like: Deb and Amilly will wonder what has become of me. How old they begin to look!"

"I don't suppose any of us look younger," answered Jan.

They went into the house. Deborah and Amilly were in a flutter of hospitality, lading the tea-table with good things that it would have gladdened Master Cheese's heart to see. They had been upstairs to smooth out their curls, to put on clean white sleeves and collars, a gold chain, and such-like little additions, setting themselves off as they were now setting off the tea-table, all in their affectionate welcome to their father. And Dr. West, who liked eating as well as ever did Master Cheese, surveyed the table with complacency as he sat down to it, ignoring the dinner he had spoken of to Jan. Amilly sat by him, heaping his plate with what he liked best, and Deborah made the tea.

"I have been observing to Mr. Jan that you are beginning to look very old, Deb," remarked the doctor. "Amilly also."

It was a cruel shaft. A bitter return for their loving welcome. Perhaps they *were* looking older,

but he need not have said it so point blank, and before Jan. They turned crimson, poor ladies, and bent to sip their tea, and tried to turn the words off with a laugh, and did not know where to look. In true innate delicacy of feeling, Dr. West and his daughter, Sibylla, rivalled each other.

The meal over, the doctor proposed to pay a visit to Deerham Court, and did so, Jan walking with him, first of all mentioning to Deborah the wish expressed by Dr. West as to occupying Jan's room for the night, that she might see the arrangement carried out.

Which she did. And Jan, at the retiring hour—though this is a little anticipating, for the evening is not yet over—escorted the doctor to the door of the room, and wished him a good night's rest, never imagining but that he enjoyed one. But had fire, or any other accident, burst open the room to public gaze in the lone night hours, Dr. West would have been seen at work, instead of asleep. Every drawer of the bureau was out, every paper it contained was misplaced. The doctor was evidently searching for something, as sedulously as he had once searched for that lost prescription, which at the time appeared so much to disturb his peace.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EVENING AT LADY VERNER'S.

IN the well-lighted drawing-room at Deerham Court was its mistress, Lady Verner. Seated with her on the same sofa was her son, Lionel. Decima, at a little distance was standing talking to Lord Garle. Lucy Tempest sat at the table, cutting the leaves of a new book; and Sibylla was bending over the fire in a shivering attitude, as if she could not get enough of its heat. Lord Garle had been dining with them.

The door opened and Jan entered. "I have brought you a visitor, Sibylla," said he, in his unceremonious fashion, without any sort of greeting to anybody. "Come in, doctor."

It caused quite a confusion, the entrance of Dr. West. All were surprised. Lionel rose, Lucy rose; Lord Garle and Decima came forward, and Sibylla sprang towards him with a cry. Lady Verner was the only one who retained entire calmness.

"Papa! it cannot be you! When did you come?"

Dr. West kissed her, and turned to Lady Verner with some courtly words. Dr. West was an adept

at such. Not the courtly words that spring genuinely from a kindly and refined nature; but those that are put on to hide a false one. All people, true-hearted ones, too, cannot distinguish between them; the false and the real. Next, the doctor grasped the hand of Lionel.

"My son-in-law!" he exclaimed, in a very demonstrative manner. "The last time you and I had the pleasure of meeting, Mr. Verner, we little anticipated that such a relationship would ensue. I rejoice to welcome you in it, my dear sir."

"True," said Lionel, with a quiet smile. "Coming events do not always cast their shadows before."

With Decima, with Lord Garle, with Lucy Tempest, the doctor severally shook hands: he had a phrase of suavity for them all.

"I should not have known you," he said to the latter.

"No!" returned Lucy. "Why?"

"You have grown, Miss Tempest. Grown much."

"Then I must have been very short before," said Lucy. "I am not tall now."

"You have grown into remarkable beauty," added the doctor.

Whether Lucy had grown into beauty, or not, she did not like being told of it. And she did not like Dr. West. She had not been in love with him ever, as you may recollect; but she seemed to like him now, as he stood before her, less and less. Drawing away from him when she could do so civilly, she went up and talked to Jan.

A little while, and they had become more settled, dispersing into groups. The doctor, his daughter, and Lionel were sitting on a couch apart, conversing in an under tone; the rest disposed themselves as they would. Dr. West had accepted a cup of coffee. He kept it in his hand, sipping it now and then, and slowly eat a biscuit.

"Mr. Jan tells me Sibylla is not very strong," he observed, addressing both of them, but more particularly Lionel.

"Not very," replied Lionel. "The cold weather of this winter has tried her; has given her a cough. She will be better, I hope, when it comes in warm."

"How do you feel, my dear?" inquired the doctor, apparently looking at his coffee-cup instead of Sibylla. "Weak here?"—touching his chest.

"Not more weak than I had used to be," she answered in a cross tone, as if the confession that she did feel weak was not pleasant to her. "There's nothing the matter with me, papa; only Lionel makes a fuss."

"Nay, Sibylla," interposed Lionel, good-humouredly, "I leave that to you and Jan."

"You would like to make papa believe you don't make a fuss!" she cried in a most resentful tone. "When you know, not two days ago, you wanted to prevent my going to the party at Mrs. Bitterworth's!"

"I plead guilty to that," said Lionel. "It was a most inclement night, a cold, raw fog that penetrated everywhere, carriages and all else, and I

wished you not to venture out in it. The doing so increased your cough."

"Mr. Verner was right," said Dr. West. "Night fogs are pernicious to a degree, where the chest and lungs are delicate. You should not stir out of the house, Sibylla, after sunset. Now don't interrupt, my dear. Let the carriage be ever so closely shut, it makes no difference. There is the change of atmosphere from the warm room to the cold carriage; there are the draughts of air in passing to it. You must not do it, Sibylla."

"Do you mean to say, papa, that I am to live like a hermit?—never to go out?" she returned, her bosom heaving with vexation. "It is not much visiting that I have had, goodness knows, since quitting Verner's Pride: if I am to give it all up, you may as well put me out of the world. As good be dead!"

"Sibylla," said the doctor, more impressively than he often spoke, "I know your constitution, and I know pretty well what you can and what you can not bear. Don't attempt to stir out after sunset again. Should you get stronger it will be a different matter. At present it must not be. Will you remember this, Mr. Verner?"

"If my wife will allow me to remember it," he said, bending to Sibylla with a kindly tone. "My will was good to keep her in, all this winter: but she would not be kept."

"What has Jan been telling you about me, papa? It is a shame of him! I am not ill."

"Mr. Jan has told me very little indeed of your ailments," replied Dr. West. "He says you are not strong: he says you are fretful, irritable. My dear, this arises from your state of health."

"I have thought so, too," said Lionel, speaking impulsively. Many and many a time, latterly, when she had nearly tired out his heart and his patience, had he been willing to find an excuse for her still—that her illness of body caused in her the irritation of mind. Or, at any rate, greatly increased it.

An eye, far less experienced than that of Dr. West—who, whatever may have been his other shortcomings, was clever in his profession—could have seen at a glance how weak Sibylla was. She wore an evening dress of white muslin, its body very low and its sleeves very short; her chest was painfully thin, and every breath she took lifted it ominously: she seemed to be breathing outside as well as in. The doctor touched the muslin.

"This is not a fit dress for you, Sibylla—"

"Lionel has been putting you up to say it, papa!" she burst forth.

Dr. West looked at her. He surmised, what was indeed the case, that her husband had remonstrated against the unsuitableness of the attire, to one in her condition.

"You have heard every word Mr. Verner has spoken to me, Sibylla. You should be wrapped up warmly always: to be exposed as you are now, is enough to—to" give you your death, he was about to say, but changed the words—"make you very ill."

"Decima and Lucy Tempest dress so," she returned, in a tone that threatened tears.

Dr. West lifted his eyes to where Decima and Lucy were standing with Lord Garle. Decima wore a silk dress; Lucy a white one: each made evening fashion.

"They are both healthy," he said, "and may wear what they please. Look at their necks, compared to yours, Sibylla. I shall ask Mr. Verner to put all these thin dresses, these low bodies, behind the fire."

"He would only have the pleasure of paying for others to replace them," was the undutiful rejoinder. "Papa, I have enough trouble, without your turning against me."

Turning against her! Dr. West did not point out how purposeless were her words. His intention was to come in in the morning, and talk to her seriously of her state of health, and the precautions it was necessary to observe. He took a sip of his coffee, and turned to Lionel.

"I was about to ask you a superfluous question, Mr. Verner—whether that lost codicil has been heard of. But your leaving Verner's Pride is an answer."

"It has never been heard of," replied Lionel. "When John Massingbird returned and put in his claim—when he took possession, I may say, for the one was coeval with the other—the wanting of the codicil was indeed a grievance: far more than it had appeared at the time of its loss."

"You must regret it much."

"I regret it always," he answered. "I regret it bitterly for Sibylla's sake."

"Papa," she cried in deep emotion, her cheeks becoming crimson, her blue eyes flashing with an unnatural light, "if that codicil could be found, it would save my life. Jan, in his rough, stupid way, tells me I am fretting myself into my grave. Perhaps I am. I want to go back to Verner's Pride."

It was not a pleasant subject to converse on; it was a subject utterly hopeless—and Dr. West sought one more genial. Ranging his eyes over the room, they fell upon Lord Garle, who was still talking with Decima and Lucy.

"Which of the two young ladies makes the viscount's attraction, Mr. Verner?"

Lionel smiled. "They do not take me into their confidence, sir; any one of the three."

"I am sure it is not Decima, papa," spoke up Sibylla. "She's as cold as a stone. I won't answer for its not being Lucy Tempest. Lord Garle comes here a good deal, and he and Lucy seem great friends. I often think he comes for Lucy."

"Then there's little doubt upon the point," observed the doctor, coming to a more rapid conclusion than the words really warranted. "Time was, Mr. Verner, when I thought that young lady would have been your wife."

"Who?" asked Lionel. But that he only asked the question in his confusion, without need, was evident: the tell-tale flush betrayed it. His pale

face had turned red; red to the very roots of his hair.

"In those old days when you were ill, lying here, and Miss Tempest was so much with you, I fancied I saw the signs of a mutual attachment," continued the doctor. "I conclude I must have been mistaken."

"Little doubt of that, doctor," lightly answered Lionel, recovering his equanimity, though he could not yet recover his disturbed complexion, and laughing as he spoke.

Sibylla's greedy ears had drunk up the words, her sharp eyes had caught the conscious flush, and her jealous heart was making the most of it. At that unfortunate moment, as ill-luck had it, Lucy brought up the basket of cakes and held it out to Dr. West. Lionel rose to take it from her.

"I was taking your name in vain, Miss Tempest," said the complacent doctor. "Did you hear me?"

"No," replied Lucy, smiling. "What about?"

"I was telling Mr. Verner that in the old days I had deemed his choice was falling upon another, rather than my daughter. Do you remember, young lady?—in that long illness of his?"

Lucy did remember. And the remembrance, thus called suddenly before her, the words themselves, the presence of Lionel, all brought to her far more emotion than had arisen to him. Her throat heaved as with a spasm, and the startled colour dyed her face. Lionel saw it. Sibylla saw it.

"It proves to us how we may be mistaken, Miss Tempest," observed the doctor, who, from that habit of his, already hinted at, the never looking people in the face when he spoke to them, had failed to observe anything. "I hear there is a probability of this fair hand being appropriated by another: one who can enhance his value by coupling it with a coronet."

"Don't take the trouble, Lucy. I am holding it."

It was Lionel who spoke. In her confusion she had not loosed hold of the cake-basket, although he had taken it. Quietly, impassively, in the most unruffled manner spoke he, smiling carelessly. Only for a moment had his self-control been shaken. "Will you take a biscuit, Dr. West?" he asked: and the doctor chose one.

"Lucy, my dear, will you step here to me?"

The request came from the other end of the room, from Lady Verner. Lionel, who was about to place the cake-basket on the table, stopped and held out his arm to Lucy, to conduct her to his mother. They went forward, utterly unconscious that Sibylla was casting angry and jealous glances at them; conscious only that those sacred feelings in either heart, so well hid from the world, had been stirred to their very depths.

The door opened, and one of the servants entered.
"Mr. Jan is wanted."

"Who's taken ill now, I wonder?" cried Jan, descending from the arm of his mother's sofa, where he had been perched.

In the ante-room was Master Cheese, looking rueful.

"There's a message come from Squire Pidcock's," cried he, in a most resentful tone. "Somebody's to attend immediately. Am *I* to go?"

"I suppose you'd faint at having to go, after being up to Miss Hautley's," returned Jan. "You'd never survive the two, should you?"

"Well, you know, Jan, it's a good mile and a half to Pidcock's, and I had to go to the other place without my tea," remonstrated Master Cheese.

"I dare say Miss Deb has given you your tea since you came home."

"But it's not like having it at the usual hour. And I couldn't finish it in comfort, when this message came."

"Be off back and finish it now, then," said Jan. And the young gentleman departed with alacrity, while Jan made the best of his way to Squire Pidcock's.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN APPEAL TO JOHN MASSINGBIRD.

LIONEL VERNER walked home with Dr. West, later in the evening. "What do you think of Sibylla?" was his first question, before they had well quitted the gates.

"My opinion is not a favourable one, so far as I can judge at present," replied Dr. West. "She must not be crossed, Mr. Verner."

"Heaven is my witness that she is not crossed by me, Dr. West," was the reply of Lionel, given more earnestly than the occasion seemed to call for. "From the hour I married her, my whole life has been spent in the endeavour to shield her from crosses, so far as lies in the power of man; to cherish her in all care and tenderness. There are few husbands would bear with her—her peculiarities—as I have borne: as I will still bear. I say this to you, her father; I would say it to no one else. My chief regret, at the wrenching from me of Verner's Pride, is for Sibylla's sake."

"My dear sir, I honestly believe you. I know what Sibylla was at home, fretful, wayward, and restless; and those tendencies are not likely to be lessened, now disease has shown itself. I always

feared it was in her constitution; that, in spite of all our care, she would follow her sisters. They fell off and died, you may remember, when they seemed most blooming. People talked freely—as I understood at the time—about my allowing her so suddenly to marry Frederick Massingbird; but my course was dictated by one sole motive—that it would give her the benefit of a sea voyage, which might prove invaluable to her constitution."

Lionel believed just as much of this as he liked. Dr. West was his wife's father, and, as such, he deferred to him. He remembered what had been told him by Sibylla; and he remembered the promise he had given her.

"It's a shocking pity that you are turned from Verner's Pride!" resumed the doctor.

"It is. But there's no help for it."

"Does Sibylla grieve after it *very* much? Has it any real effect, think you, upon her health?—as she seemed to intimate."

"She grieves, no doubt. She *keeps up* the grief, if you can understand it, Dr. West. Not a day passes, but she breaks into lamentations over the loss, complaining loudly and bitterly. Whether her health would not equally have failed at Verner's Pride, I am unable to say. I think it would."

"John Massingbird, under the circumstances, ought to give it up to you. It is *rightfully* yours. Sibylla's life—and she is his own cousin—may depend upon it: he ought not to keep it. But for the loss of the codicil, he would never have come to it."

"Of course he could not," assented Lionel. "It is that loss which has upset everything."

Dr. West fell into silence, and continued in it until his house was in view. Then he spoke again.

"What will you undertake to give me, Mr. Verner, if I can bring John Massingbird to hear reason, and re-establish you at Verner's Pride?"

"Not anything," answered Lionel. "Verner's Pride is John Massingbird's according to the law; therefore it cannot be mine. Neither would he resign it."

"I wonder whether it could be done by stratagem?" mused Dr. West. "Could we persuade him that the codicil has turned up?—or something of that? It would be very desirable for Sibylla."

"If I go back to Verner's Pride at all, sir, I go back by *right*; neither by purchase nor by stratagem," was the reply of Lionel. "Rely upon it, things set about in an underhand manner never prosper."

"I might get John Massingbird to give it up to you," continued the doctor, nodding his head thoughtfully, as if he had some scheme afloat in it. "I might get him to resign it to you, rents and residence and all, and betake himself off. You would give me a per centage?"

"Were John Massingbird to offer such to me to-morrow, of his own free will, I should decline it," decisively returned Lionel. "I have suffered too much from Verner's Pride ever to take posses-

sion of it again, except by indisputable right—a right in which I cannot be disturbed. Twice have I been turned from it, as you know. And the turning out has cost me more than the world deemed."

"But surely you would go back to it if you could, for Sibylla's sake?"

"Were I a rich man, able to rent Verner's Pride from John Massingbird, I might ask him to let it me, if it would gratify Sibylla. But, to return there as its master, on sufferance, liable to be expelled again at any moment,—never! John Massingbird holds the right to Verner's Pride, and he will exercise it, for me."

"Then you will not accept my offer—to try and get you back again; and to make me a substantial honorarium if I do it?"

"I do not understand you, Dr. West. The question cannot arise."

"If I make it arise; and carry it out?"

"I beg your pardon—No."

It was an emphatic denial, and Dr. West may have felt himself foiled: as he had been foiled by Jan's confession of empty pockets, earlier in the evening.

"Nevertheless," observed he equably, as he shook hands with Lionel, before entering his own house, "I shall see John Massingbird to-morrow, and urge the hardship of the case upon him."

It was probably with that view that Dr. West proceeded early on the following morning to Verner's

Pride, after his night of search, instead of sleep, astonishing John Massingbird not a little. That gentleman was enjoying himself in a comfortable sort of way in his bedroom. A substantial breakfast was laid out on a table by the bed-side, while he, not risen, smoked a pipe as he lay, by way of whetting his appetite. Dr. West entered without ceremony.

“My stars!” uttered John, when he could believe his eyes. “It’s never you, Uncle West! Did you drop from a balloon?”

Dr. West explained. That he had come over for a few hours’ sojourn. The state of his dear daughter Sibylla was giving him considerable uneasiness, and he had put himself to the expense and inconvenience of a journey to see her, and judge of her state himself.

That there were a few trifling inaccuracies in this statement, inasmuch as that his daughter’s state had had nothing to do with the doctor’s journey, was of little consequence. It was all one to John Massingbird. He made a hasty toilette, and invited the doctor to take some breakfast.

Dr. West was nothing loth. He had breakfasted at home; but a breakfast more or less, was nothing to Dr. West. He sat down to the table, and took a choice morsel of boned chicken on his plate.

“John, I have come up to talk to you about Verner’s Pride.”

“What about it?” asked John, speaking with his mouth full of devilled kidneys.

"The place is Lionel Verner's."

"How d'ye make out that?" asked John.

"That codicil revoked the will which left the estate to you. It gave it to him."

"But the codicil vanished," answered John.

"True. I was present at the consternation it excited. It disappeared in some unaccountably mysterious way; but there's no doubt that Mr. Verner died, believing the estate would go in its direct line—to Lionel. In fact, I know he did. Therefore you ought to act as though the codicil were in existence, and resign the estate to Lionel Verner."

The recommendation excessively tickled the fancy of John Massingbird. It set him laughing for five minutes.

"In short, you never ought to have attempted to enter upon it," continued, Dr. West. "Will you resign it to him?"

"Uncle West, you'll kill me with laughter, if you joke like that," was the reply.

"I have little doubt that the codicil is still in existence," urged Dr. West. "I remember my impression at the time was, that it was only mislaid, temporarily lost. If that codicil turned up, you would be obliged to quit."

"So I should," said John, with equanimity. "Let Lionel Verner produce it, and I'll vacate the next hour. *That* will never turn up: don't you fret yourself, Uncle West."

"Will you not resign it to him?"

"No, that I won't. Verner's Pride is mine by law. I should be a simpleton to give it up."

"Sibylla's pining for it," resumed the doctor, trying what a little pathetic pleading would do. "She will as surely die, unless she can come back to Verner's Pride, as that you and I are at breakfast here."

"If you ask my opinion, Uncle West, I should say that she'd die, any way. She looks like it. She's fading away just as the other two did. But she won't die a day sooner for being away from Verner's Pride; and she would not have lived an hour longer had she remained in it. That's my belief."

"Verner's Pride never was intended for you, John," cried the doctor. "Some freak caused Mr. Verner to will it away from Lionel; but he came to his senses before he died, and repaired the injury."

"Then I am so much the more obliged to the freak," was the good-humoured but uncompromising rejoinder of John Massingbird.

And more than that Dr. West could not make of him. John was evidently determined to stand by Verner's Pride. The doctor then changed his tactics, and tried a little business on his own account—that of borrowing from John Massingbird as much money as that gentleman would lend.

It was not much. John, in his laughing way, protested he was always "cleaned out." Nobody knew but himself—but he did not mind hinting it

to Uncle West—the heaps of money he had been obliged to “shell out” before he could repose in tranquillity at Verner’s Pride. There were back entanglements and present expenses. Not to speak of sums spent in benevolence. “Benevolence?” the doctor exclaimed. “Yes, benevolence,” John replied with a semi-grave face: he “had had to give away an unlimited number of bank-notes to the neighbourhood, as a recompense for having terrified it into fits.” There were times when he thought he should have to come upon Lionel Verner for the mesne profits, he observed. A procedure which he was unwilling to resort to for two reasons: the one was, that Lionel possessed nothing to pay them with; the other, that he, John, never liked to be hard.

So the doctor had to content himself with a very trifling loan, compared with the sum he had fondly anticipated. He dropped some obscure hints that the evidence he could give, if he chose, with reference to the codicil, or rather what he knew to have been Mr. Verner’s intentions, might go far to deprive his nephew John of the estate. But his nephew only laughed at him, and could not by any manner of means be induced to treat the hints as serious. A will was a will, he said, and Verner’s Pride was indisputably his.

Altogether, taking one thing with another, Dr. West’s visit to Deerham had not been quite so satisfactory as he had anticipated it might be made. After quitting John Massingbird, he went to

Deerham Court and remained a few hours with Sibylla. The rest of the day he divided between his daughters in their sitting-room, and Jan in the surgery, taking his departure again from Deerham by the night train.

And Deborah and Amilly, drowned in tears, said his visit could be compared only to the flash of a comet's tail: no sooner seen than gone again.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SIN AND A SHAME.

As the spring advanced, sickness began to prevail in Deerham. The previous autumn, the season when the enemy chiefly loved to show itself, had been comparatively free, but he appeared to be about taking his revenge now. In every third house people were down with ague and fever. Men who ought to be strong for their daily toil, women whose services were wanted for their households and their families, children whose young frames were unfitted to battle with it, were indiscriminately attacked. It was capricious as a summer's wind: In some dwellings it would be the strongest and bravest singled out; in some the weakest and most delicate. Jan was worked off his legs. Those necessary appendages to active Jan generally were exercised pretty well; but Jan could not remember the time when they had been worked as they were now. Jan grew cross. Not at the amount of work: it may be questioned whether Jan did not rather prefer that, than the contrary; but at the prevailing state of things. "It's a sin and a shame that precautions are not taken against this periodical sickness," said Jan, speaking out more forcibly than

was his wont. “If the place were drained and the dwellings improved, the ague would run away to more congenial quarters. I’d not own Verner’s Pride, unless I could show myself fit to be its owner.”

The shaft may have been levelled at John Massingbird, but Lionel Verner took it to himself. How full of self-reproach he was, he alone knew. He had had the power in his own hands to make these improvements, and in some manner or other he had let the time slip by: now, the power was wrested from him. It is ever so. Golden opportunities come into our hands, and we look at them complacently, and—do not use them. Bitter regrets, sometimes remorse, take their places when they have flitted away for ever; but neither the regret nor the remorse can recal the opportunity lost.

Lionel pressed the necessity upon John Massingbird. It was all he could do now. John received it with complacent good-humour, and laughed at Lionel for making the request. But that was all.

“Set about draining Clay Lane, and build up new tenements in place of the old?” cried he. “What next, Lionel?”

“Look at the sickness the present state of things brings,” returned Lionel. “It is what ought to have been altered years ago.”

“Ah!” said John. “Why didn’t you alter it, then, when you had Verner’s Pride?”

“You may well ask! It was my first thought when I came into the estate. I would set about

that; I would set about other improvements. Some I did carry out, as you know; but these, the most needful, I left in abeyance. It lies on my conscience now."

They were in the study. Lionel was at the desk, some papers before him; John Massingbird had lounged in for a chat—as he was fond of doing, to the interruption of Lionel. He was leaning against the door-post; his attire not precisely such that a gentleman might choose, who wished to send his photograph to make a morning call. His pantaloons were hitched up by a belt; braces, John said, were not fashionable at the Diggings, and he had learned the comfort of doing without them; a loose sort of round drab coat without tails; no waistcoat; a round brown hat, much bent, and a pair of slippers. Such was John Massingbird's favourite costume, and he might be seen in it at all hours of the day. When he wanted to go abroad, his toilette was made, as the French say, by the exchanging of the slippers for boots, and the taking in his hand a club stick. John's whiskers were growing again, and promised to be as fine a pair as he had worn before going out to Australia: and now he was letting his beard grow, but it looked very grim and stubbly. Truth to say, a stranger passing through the village and casting his eyes on Mr. John Massingbird, would have taken him to be a stable helper, rather than the master of that fine place, Verner's Pride. Just now he had a clay pipe in his mouth, its stem little more than an inch long.

"Do you mean to assert that you'd set about these improvements, as you call them, were you to come again into Verner's Pride?" asked he of Lionel.

"I believe I should. I would say unhesitatingly that I should, save for past experience," continued Lionel. "Before my uncle died, I knew how necessary it was that they should be made, and I as much believed that I should set about them the instant I came into the estate, as that I believe I am now talking to you. But you see I did not begin them. It has taught me to be chary of making assertions beforehand."

"I suppose you think you'd do it?"

"If I know anything of my own resolution I should do it. Were Verner's Pride to lapse to me to-morrow, I believe I should set about it the next day. But," Lionel added, after a short pause, "there's no probability of its lapsing to me. Therefore I want you to set about it in my place."

"I can't afford it," replied John Massingbird.

"Nonsense! I wish I could afford things a quarter as well as you."

"I tell you I can't," reiterated John, taking his pipe from his mouth to make a spittoon of the carpet, another convenience he had learnt at the Diggings. "I'm sure I don't know how on earth my money goes; I never did know all my life how money went: but, go it does. When Fred and I were little chaps, some benevolent old soul tipped us half-a-crown a-piece. Mine was gone by middle-

day, and I could not account for more than nine-pence of it: never could till this day. Fred at the end of a twelvemonth's time had got his half-crown still snug in his pocket. Had Fred come into Verner's Pride, he'd have lived in style on a thousand of his income yearly, and put by the rest."

He never would, Sibylla being his wife, thought Lionel. But he did not say it to John Massingbird.

"An estate, such as this, brings its duties with it, John," said he. "Remember those poor people down with sickness."

"Bother duty," returned John. "Look here, Lionel; you waste your breath and your words. I have *not* got the money to spend upon it; how do you know, old fellow, what my private expenses may be? And if I had the money, I should not do it," he continued. "The present state of the property was deemed good enough by Mr. Verner; it was so deemed (if we may judge by facts) by Mr. Lionel Verner; and it is deemed good enough by John Massingbird. It is not he who's going to have the cost thrown upon him. So let it drop."

There was no resource but to let it drop; for that he was in full earnest, Lionel saw. John continued:

"You can save up the alterations for yourself, to be commenced when you come into the property. A nice *bonne bouche* of outlay for you to contemplate."

"I don't look to come into it," replied Lionel.

"The probabilities are that you will come into

it," returned John Massingbird, more seriously than he often spoke. "Barring getting shot, or run over by a railway train, you'll make old bones, you will. You have never played with your constitution; I have, in more ways than one: and in bare years I have considerably the advantage of you. Psha! when I am a skeleton in my coffin, you'll still be a young man. You can make your cherished alterations then."

"You may well say in more ways than one," returned Lionel, half joking, half serious. "There's smoking amidst the catalogue. How many pipes do you smoke in a day? Fifty?"

"Why didn't you say day and night? Tynn lives in perpetual torment lest my bed should ignite some night, and burn up him, as well as Verner's Pride. I go to sleep sometimes with my pipe in my mouth as we do at the Diggings. Now and then I feel half inclined to make a rush back there. It suited me better than this."

Lionel bent over some papers that were before him,—a hint that he had business to do. Mr. Massingbird did not take it. He began filling his pipe again, scattering the tobacco on the ground wholesale in the process, and talking at the same time.

"I say, Lionel, why did old Verner leave the place away from you? Have you ever wondered?"

Lionel glanced up at him in surprise.

"Have I ever ceased wondering, you might have said. I don't know why he did."

"Did he never give you a reason—or an explanation?"

"Nothing of the sort. Except—yes, except a trifle. Some time after his death, Mrs. Tynn discovered a formidable-looking packet in one of his drawers: sealed, and directed to me. She thought it was the missing codicil; so did I, until I opened it. It proved to contain nothing but a glove; one of my old gloves, and a few lines from my uncle. They were to the effect that when I received the glove I should know why he disinherited me."

"And did you know?" asked John Massingbird, applying a light to his pipe.

"Not in the least. It left the affair more obscure, if possible, than it had been before. I suppose I never shall know now."

"Never's a long day," cried John Massingbird. "But you told me about this glove affair before."

"Did I? Oh, I remember. When you first returned. That is all the explanation I have ever had."

"It was not much," said John. "Dickens take this pipe! It won't draw. Where's my knife?"

Not finding his knife about him, he went off to look for it, dragging his slippers along the hall in his usual lazy fashion. Lionel, glad of the respite, applied himself to his work.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A NIGHT GONE BY.

ONE was dying in Deerham, but not of ague - and that was old Matthew Frost. Matthew was dying of old age, to which we must all succumb, if we live long enough.

April was in, and the fever and ague were getting better. News was brought to Lionel one morning that old Matthew was not expected to last through the day. Jan entered the breakfast room at Deerham Court and told him so. Lionel had been starting to Verner's Pride ; but he changed his course towards Clay Lane.

"Jan," said he, as he was turning away, "I wish you'd go up and see Sibylla. I am sure she is very ill."

"I'll go if you like," said Jan. "But there's no use in it. She won't listen to a word I say, or attend to a single direction that I give. Hayes told me, when he came over last week, that it was the same with him. She persists to him, as she does to me, that she has no need of medicine or care ; that she is quite well."

"I am aware she persists in it," replied Lionel. "But I feel sure she is very ill."

"I know she is," said Jan. "She's worse than folks think for. Perhaps you amongst them, Lionel. I'll go up to her." He turned back to the house as he spoke, and Lionel went on to Clay Lane.

Old Matthew was lying on his bed, very peaceful. Peaceful as to his inward and his outward state. Though exceedingly weak, gradually sinking, he retained both speech and intellect: he was passing away without pain, and with his faculties about him. What a happy death-bed, when all is peace within! His dim eyes lighted up with pleasure when he saw Mr. Verner.

"Have you come to see the last of me, sir?" he asked, as Lionel took his hand.

"Not quite the last yet, I hope, Matthew."

"Don't hope it, sir; nor wish it, neither," returned the old man, lifting his hand with a deprecatory movement. "I'm on the threshold of a better world, sir, and I'd not turn back to this, if God was to give me the choice of it. I'm going to my rest, sir. Like as my bed has waited for me and been welcome to me after a hard day's toil, so is my rest now at hand after my life's toil. It is as surely waiting for me as ever was my bed; and I am longing to get to it."

Lionel looked down at the calm, serene face, fair and smooth yet. The skin was drawn tight over it, especially over the well-formed nose, and the white locks fell on the pillow behind. It may be wrong to say there was a holy expression pervading the

face; but it certainly gave that impression to Lionel Verner.

"I wish all the world—when their time comes—could die as you are dying, Matthew!" he exclaimed, in the impulse of his heart.

"Sir, all *might*. If they'd only live for it. It's many a year ago now, Mr. Lionel, that I learnt to make a friend of God: He has stood me in good need. And those that do learn to make a friend of Him, sir, don't fear to go to Him."

Lionel drew forward a chair and sat down in it. The old man continued:

"Things seem to have been smoothed for me in a wonderful manner, sir. My great trouble, of late years, has been Robin. I feared how it might be with him when I went away and left him here alone: for you know the queer way he has been in, sir, since that great misfortune; and I have been a bit of a check on him, keeping him, as may be said, within bounds. Well, that trouble is done away for me, sir; Robin he has got his mind at rest, and he won't break out again. In a short while I am in hopes he'll be quite what he used to be."

"Matthew, it was my firm intention to continue your annuity to Robin," spoke Lionel. "I am sorry the power to do so has been taken from me. You know that it will not rest with me now, but with Mr. Massingbird. I fear he is not likely to continue it."

"Don't regret it, sir. Robin, I say, is growing to be an industrious man again, and he can get a

living well. If he had stopped a half-dazed-do-nothing, he might have wanted that, or some other help; but it isn't so. His trouble's at rest, and his old energies are coming back to him. It seems to have left my mind at leisure, sir; and I can go away, praying for the souls of my poor daughter and of Frederick Massingbird."

The name—*his*—aroused the attention of Lionel: more perhaps than he would have cared to confess. But his voice and manner retained their quiet calmness.

"What did you say, Matthew?"

"It was him, sir; Mr. Frederick Massingbird. It was nobody else."

Down deep in Lionel Verner's heart there had lain a conviction, almost ever since that fatal night, that the man had been no other than the one now spoken of, the younger Massingbird. Why the impression should have come to him he could not have told at the time: something perhaps in Frederick's manner had given rise to it. On the night before John Massingbird's departure for Australia, after the long interview he had held with Mr. Verner in the study, which was broken in upon by Lionel on the part of Robin Frost, the three young men—the Massingbirds and Lionel—had subsequently remained together, discussing the tragedy. In that interview it was, that a sudden doubt of Frederick Massingbird entered the mind of Lionel. It was impossible for him to tell why: he only knew that the impression—nay, it were more correct

to say the conviction, seized hold upon him, never to be eradicated. Perhaps something strange in Frederick's manner awoke it. Lionel surmised not how far his guilt might have extended ; but that he was the guilty one, he fully believed. It was not his business to proclaim this ; had it been a certainty, instead of a fancy, Lionel would not have made it his business : but when Frederick Massingbird was on the point of marrying Sibylla, then Lionel partially broke through his reserve, and asked him whether he had nothing on his conscience that ought to prevent his making her his wife. Frederick answered freely and frankly, to all appearance, and for the moment Lionel's doubts were dissipated : only, however, to return afterwards with increased force. Consequently he was not surprised to hear this said, though surprised at Matthew Frost's knowing it.

"How did you hear it, Matthew ?" he asked.

"Robin got at it, sir. Poor Robin, he was altogether on the wrong scent for a long while, thinking it was Mr. John ; but it's set right now, and Robin, he's at ease. May Heaven have mercy upon Frederick Massingbird !"

Successful rival though he had proved to him, guilty man that he had been, Lionel heartily echoed the prayer. He asked no more questions of the old man upon the subject, but afterwards, when he was going out, he met Robin and stopped him.

"Robin, what is this that your father has been telling me about Frederick Massingbird ?"

"Only to think of it!" was Robin's response, growing somewhat excited. "To think how our ways get balked! I had swore to be revenged—as you know, sir—and now the power of revenge is took from me! He's gone where my revenge can't reach him. It's of no good—I see it—for us to plan. Our plans 'll never be carried out, if they don't please God."

"And it was Frederick Massingbird?"

"It was Frederick Massingbird," assented Robin, his breath coming thick and fast with agitation. "We had got but one little ewe lamb, and he must leave the world that was open to him, and pick her up, and destroy her! I ain't calm yet to talk of it, sir."

"But how did you ascertain this? Your suspicions, you know, were directed to Mr. John Massingbird. Wrongly, as I believed; as I told you"

"Yes, they were wrong," said Robin. "I was put upon the wrong scent: but not wilfully. You might remember a dairy wench that lived at Verner's Pride in them days—sir Dolly, her name was; she that went and got married after to Joe Stubbs, Mr. Bitterworth's waggoner. It was she told me, sir. I used to be up there a good bit with Stubbs, and one day when I was sick and ill there, the wife told me she had seen one of the gentlemen come from the Willow Pool that past night. I pressed her to tell me which of them, and at first she said she couldn't, and then she said it was Mr.

John. I never thought but she told me right, but it seems—as she confesses now—that she only fixed on him to satisfy me, and because she thought he was dead, over in Australia, and it wouldn't matter if she did say it. I worried her life out over it, she says: and it's like I did. She says now, if she was put upon her Bible oath, she couldn't say which of the gentlemen it was, more nor the other: but she did see one of 'em."

"But this is not telling me how you know it to have been Mr. Frederick, Robin."

"I learnt it from Mr. John," was the reply. "When he come back I saw him; I knew it was him; and I got a gun and watched for him. I meant to take my revenge, sir. Roy, he found me out; and in a night or two, he brought me face to face with Mr. John, and Mr. John he told me the truth. But he'd only tell it me upon my giving him my promise not to expose his brother. So I'm balked even of that revenge. I had always counted on the exposing of the man," added Robin, in a dreamy tone, as if he were looking back into the past: "when I thought it was Mr. John, I only waited for Luke Roy to come home, that I might expose him. I judged that Luke, being so much with him in Australia, might have heard a slip word drop as would confirm it. Somehow, though I thought Dolly Stubbs spoke truth, I didn't feel so sure of her as to noise it abroad."

"You say it was Mr. John Massingbird who told you it was his brother?"

"He told me, sir. He told me at Roy's, when he was a hiding there. When the folks here was going mad about the ghost, I knowed who the ghost was, and had my laugh at 'em. It seemed that I could laugh then," added Robin, looking at Mr. Verner, as if he deemed an apology for the words necessary. "My mind was set at rest."

Did a thought cross Lionel Verner that John Massingbird, finding his own life in peril from Robin's violence, had thrown the blame upon his brother falsely? It might have done so, but for his own deeply-rooted suspicions. That John would not be scrupulously regardful of truth, he believed, where his own turn was to be served. Lionel at any rate felt that he should like, for his own satisfaction, to have the matter set at rest, and he took his way to Verner's Pride.

John Massingbird, his costume not improved in elegance, or his clay pipe in length, was lounging at his ease on one of the amber damask satin couches of the drawing-room, his feet on the back of a proximate chair, and his slippers fallen off on the carpet. A copious tumbler of rum-and-water—his favourite beverage since his return—was on a table, handy; and there he lay enjoying his ease.

"Hallo, old fellow! How are you?" was his greeting to Lionel, given without changing his position in the least.

"Massingbird, I want to speak to you," rejoined Lionel. "I have been to see old Matthew Frost, and he has said something which surprises me—"

"The old man's about to make a start of it, I hear," was the interruption of Mr. Massingbird.

"He cannot last long. He has been speaking—naturally—of that unhappy business of his daughter's. He lays it to the door of Frederick; and Robin tells me he had the information from you."

"I was obliged to give it him, in self-defence," said John Massingbird. "The fellow had got it into his head, in some unaccountable manner, that I was the black sheep, and was prowling about with a gun, ready capped and loaded, to put a bullet into me. I don't set so much store by my life as some fidgets do, but it's not pleasant to be shot off in that summary fashion. So I sent for Mr. Robin and satisfied him that he was making the same blunder that Deerham just then was making—mistaking one brother for the other."

"Was it Frederick?"

"It was."

"Did you know it at the time?"

"No. Never suspected him at all."

"Then how did you learn it afterwards?"

John Massingbird took his legs from the chair. He rose, and brought himself to an anchor on a seat facing Lionel, puffing still at his incessant pipe.

"I don't mind trusting you, old chap, being one of us, and I couldn't help trusting Robin Frost. Roy, he knew it before: at least, his wife did; which amounts to something of the same; and she spoke of it to me. I have ordered them to keep a close

tongue, under pain of unheard-of penalties. Which I should never inflict: but it's as well to let poor Fred's memory rest in quiet and good odour. I believe honestly it's the only scrape of the sort he ever got into. He was cold and cautious."

"But how did you learn it?" reiterated Lionel.

"I'll tell you. I learnt it from Luke Roy."

"From Luke Roy!" repeated Lionel, more at sea than before.

"Do you remember that I had sent Luke on to London a few days before this happened? He was to get things forward for our voyage. He was *fou*—as the French say—after Rachel; and what did he do but come back again in secret, to get a last look at her, perhaps a word. It happened to be this very night, and Luke was a partial witness to the scene at the Willow Pond. He saw and heard her meeting with Frederick; heard quite enough to know that there was no chance for him; and he was stealing away, leaving Fred and Rachel at the termination of their quarrel, when he met his mother. She knew him, it seems, and to that encounter we are indebted for her display when before Mr. Verner, and her lame account of the 'ghost.' You must recollect it. She got up the ghost tale to excuse her own terror; to throw the scent off Luke. The woman says her life, since, has been that of a martyr, ever fearing that suspicion might fall upon her son. She recognised him beyond doubt; and nearly died with the consternation. He glided off, never speaking to

her, but the fear and consternation remained. She recognized, too, she says, the voice of Frederick as the one that was quarrelling; but she did not dare confess it. For one thing, she knew not how far Luke might be implicated."

Lionel leaned his brow on his hand, deep in thought. "How far was Frederick implicated?" he asked in a low tone. "Did he—did he put her into the pond?"

"No!" burst forth John Massingbird, with a vehemence that sent the ashes of his pipe flying. "Fred would not be guilty of such a crime as that, any more than you or I would. He had—he had made vows to the girl, and broken them; and that was the extent of it. No such great sin, after all, or it wouldn't be so fashionable a one," carelessly added John Massingbird.

Lionel waited in silence.

"By what Luke could gather," went on John, "it appeared that Rachel had seen Fred that night with his cousin Sibylla—your wife now. What she had seen or heard, goodness knows: but enough to prove to her that Fred's real love was given to Sibylla; that she was his contemplated wife. It drove Rachel mad: Fred had probably filled her up with the idea that the honour was destined for herself. Men are deceivers ever, and women soft, you know, Lionel."

"And they quarrelled over it?"

"They quarrelled over it. Rachel, awakened out of her credulity, met him with bitter reproaches.

Luke could not hear what was said towards its close. The meeting—no doubt a concerted one—had been in that grove in view of the Willow-pond, the very spot that Master Luke had chosen for his own hiding-place. They left it and walked towards Verner's Pride, disputing vehemently; Roy made off the other way, and the last he saw of them, when they were nearly out of sight, was a final explosion, in which they parted. Fred set off to run towards Verner's Pride, and Rachel came flying back towards the pond. There's not a shadow of doubt that in her passion, her unhappy state of feeling, she flung herself in: and if Luke had only waited two minutes longer, he might have been in at the death—as we say by the foxes. That's the solution of what has puzzled Deerham for years, Lionel."

" Could Luke not have saved her? "

" He never knew she was in the pond. Whether the unexpected sight of his mother scared his senses away, he has often wondered; but he heard neither the splash in the water nor the shriek. He made off, pretty quick, he says, for fear his mother should attempt to stop him, or proclaim his presence aloud—an inconvenient procedure, since he was supposed to be in London. Luke never knew of her death until we were on the voyage. I got to London only in time to go on board the ship in the docks, and we had been out for days at sea before he learnt that Rachel was dead, or I that Luke had been down, on the sly, to Deerham. I had to get over that precious sea-sickness, before entering

upon that, or any other talk, I can tell you. It's a shame it should attack men!"

"I suspected Fred at the time," said Lionel.

"You did! Well, I did not. My suspicions had turned to a very different quarter."

"Upon whom?"

"O bother! where's the good of ripping it up, now it's over and done with?" retorted John Massingbird. "There's the paper of baccy by your elbow, chum. Chuck it here."

CHAPTER XIX.

A CRISIS IN SIBYLLA'S LIFE.

SIBYLLA VERNER improved neither in health nor in temper. Body and mind were alike diseased. As the spring had advanced, her weakness appeared to increase ; the symptoms of consumption became more palpable. She would not allow that she was ill ; she no doubt thought that there was nothing serious the matter with her ; nothing, as she told everybody, but the vexing after Verner's Pride.

Dr. West had expressed an opinion that her irritability, which she could neither conceal nor check, was the result of her state of health. He was very likely right. One thing was certain : that since she grew weaker and worse, this unhappy frame of mind had greatly increased. The whole business of her life appeared to be to grumble ; to be cross, snappish, fretful. If her body was diseased, most decidedly her temper was also. The great grievance of quitting Verner's Pride she made a plea for the indulgence of every complaint under the sun. She could no longer gather a gay crowd of visitors around her ; she had lost the opportunity with Verner's Pride : she could no longer indulge in unlimited orders for new dresses and bonnets, and other charming ad-

juncts to the toilette, without reference to how they were to be paid for : she had not a dozen servants at her beck and call ; and if she wanted to pay a visit, there was no elegant equipage, the admiration of all beholders, to convey her. She had lost all with Verner's Pride. Not a day—scarcely an hour—passed, but one or other, or all of these vexations, were made the subject of fretful, open repining. Not to Lady Verner : Sibylla would not have dared to annoy her ; not to Decima or to Lucy ; but to her husband. How weary his ear was, how weary his spirit, no tongue could tell. She tried him in every way—she did nothing but find fault with him. When he stayed out, she grumbled at him for staying, meeting him with reproaches on his entrance ; when he remained in, she grumbled at him. In her sad frame of mind, it was essential—there are frames of mind in which it *is* essential, as the medical men will tell you ; where the sufferer cannot help it—that she should have some object on whom to vent her irritability. Not being in her own house, there was but her husband. He was the only one sufficiently nearly connected with her to whom the courtesies of life could be dispensed with ; and therefore he came in for it all. At Verner's Pride there would have been her servants to share it with him ; at Dr. West's there would have been her sisters ; at Lady Verner's there was her husband alone. Times upon times Lionel felt inclined to run away ; as the disobedient boys run to sea.

The little hint, dropped by Dr. West, touching

the past, had not been without its fruits in Sibylla's mind. It lay and smouldered there. *Had* Lionel been attached to Lucy?—had there been love-scenes, love-making between them? Sibylla asked herself the questions ten times in a day. Now and then she let drop a sharp acrid bit of venom to him—his “old love, Lucy.” Lionel would receive it with impassibility, never answering.

On the day spoken of in the last chapter, when Matthew Frost was dying, she was more ill at ease, more intensely irritable, than usual. Lady Verner had gone with some friends to Heartburg, and was not expected home until night; Decima and Lucy walked out in the afternoon, and Sibylla was alone. Lionel had not been home since he went out in the morning to see Matthew Frost. The fact was, Lionel had had a busy day of it: what with old Matthew and what with his conversation with John Massingbird afterwards, certain work which ought to have been done in the morning he had left till the afternoon. It was nothing unusual for him to be out all day: but Sibylla was choosing to make his being out on this day an unusual grievance. As the hours of the afternoon passed on and on, and it grew late, and nobody appeared, she could scarcely suppress her temper, her restlessness. She was a bad one to be alone; had never liked to be alone for five minutes in her life: and thence perhaps the secret of her having made so much of a companion of her maid, Benoite. In point of fact, Sibylla Verner had no resources within herself; and she

made up for the want by indulging in her naturally bad temper?

Where were they? Where was Decima? Where was Lucy? Above all, where was Lionel? Sibylla, not being able to answer the questions, suddenly began to get up a pretty little plot of imagination—that Lucy and Lionel were somewhere together. Had Sibylla possessed one of Sam Weller's patent self-acting microscopes, able to afford a view through space and stairs and deal doors, she might have seen Lionel seated alone in the study at Verner's Pride, amidst his leases and papers; and Lucy in Clay Lane, paying visits with Decima from cottage to cottage. Not possessing one of those admirable instruments—if somebody at the West-end would but set up a stock of them for sale, what a lot of customers he'd have!—Sibylla was content to cherish the mental view she had conjured up, and to improve upon it. All the afternoon she kept improving upon it, until she worked herself up to that agreeable pitch of distorted excitement when the mind does not know what is real, and what fancy. It was a regular April day; one of sunshine and storm: now, the sun shining out bright and clear; now, the rain pattering against the panes; and Sibylla wandered from room to room, up stairs and down, as stormy as the weather.

Had her dreams been types of fact? Upon glancing from the window, during a sharper shower than any they had yet had, she saw her husband coming in at the large gates, Lucy Tempest on his

arm, over whom he was holding an umbrella. They were walking slowly; conversing—as it seemed—confidentially. It was quite enough for Mrs. Verner.

But it was a very innocent, accidental meeting, and the confidential conversation was only about the state of poor old Matthew Frost. Lionel had taken Clay Lane on his road home for the purpose of inquiring after old Matthew. There, standing in the kitchen, he found Lucy. Decima was with the old man, and it was uncertain how long she would stay with him: and Lucy, who had no umbrella, was waiting for the shower to be over to get back to Deerham Court. Lionel offered her the shelter of his. As they advanced through the court-yard, Lucy saw Sibylla at the small drawing-room window—the ante-room, as it was called—and nodded a smiling greeting to her. She did not return it, and Lionel saw that his wife looked black as night.

They came in, Lucy untying her bonnet-strings, and addressing Sibylla in a pleasant tone—

“What a sharp storm!” she said. “And I think it means to last, for there seems no sign of its clearing up. I don’t know how I should have come, but for Mr. Verner’s umbrella.”

No reply from Mrs. Verner.

“Decima is with old Matthew Frost,” continued Lucy, passing into the drawing-room; “she desired that we would not wait dinner for her.”

Then began Sibylla. She turned upon Lionel in a state of perfect fury, her temper, like a tor-

rent, bearing down all before it—all decency, all consideration.

“Where have you been? You and she?”

“Do you allude to Lucy?” he asked, pausing before he replied, and looking at her with surprise. “We have been nowhere. I saw her at old Frost's as I came by, and brought her home.”

“It is a falsehood!” raved Sibylla. “You are carrying on a secret intimacy with each other. I have been blind long enough, but—”

Lionel caught her arm, pointing in peremptory silence to the drawing-room door, which was not closed, his white face betraying his inward agitation.

“She is there!” he whispered. “She can hear you.”

But Sibylla's passion was terrible—not to be controlled. All the courtesies of life were lost sight of—its social usages were as nothing. She flung Lionel's hand away from her.

“I hope she can hear me!” broke like a torrent from her trembling lips. “It is time she heard, and others also! I have been blind, I say, long enough. But for papa, I might have gone on in my blindness to the end.”

How was he to stop it? That Lucy must hear every word as plainly as he did, he knew; words that fell upon his ear, and blistered them. There was no egress for her—no other door—she was there in a cage, as may be said. He did what was the best to be done under the circumstances: he

walked into the presence of Lucy, leaving Sibylla to herself.

At least it might have been the best in some cases. It was not in this. Sibylla, lost in that moment to all sense of the respect due to herself, to her husband, to Lucy, allowed her wild fancies, her passion, to over-master everything; and she followed him in. Her eyes blazing, her cheeks aflame, she planted herself in front of Lucy.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, Lucy Tempest, to wile my husband from me?"

Lucy looked perfectly aghast. That she thought Mrs. Verner had suddenly gone mad, may be excused to her. A movement of fear escaped her, and she drew involuntarily nearer to Lionel, as if for protection.

"No! you shan't go to him! There has been enough of it. You shall not side with him against me! He is my husband! How dare you forget it? You are killing me amongst you."

"I—don't—know—what—you—mean, Mrs. Verner," gasped Lucy, the words coming in jerks from her bloodless lips.

"Can you deny that he cares for you more than he does for me? That you care for him in return? Can not you—"

"Be silent, Sibylla!" burst forth Lionel. "Do you know that you are speaking to Miss Tempest?"

"I won't be silent!" she reiterated, her voice rising to a scream. Who is Lucy Tempest, that you should care for her? You know you do! and

you know that you meant to marry her once! Is it—”

Pushing his wife on a chair, though gently, with one arm, Lionel caught the hand of Lucy, and placed it within the other, his chest heaving with emotion. He led her out of the room and through the anteroom, in silence to the door, halting there. She was shaking all over, and the tears were coursing down her cheeks. He took both her hands in his, his action one of deprecating entreaty, his words falling in the tenderest accents from between his bloodless lips.

“ Will you *bear* for my sake, Lucy? She is my wife. Heaven knows, upon any other I would retort the insult.”

How Lucy’s heart was wrung!—wrung for him. The insult to herself she could afford: being innocent, it fell with very slender force; but she felt keenly for his broken peace. Had it been to save her life, she could not help returning the pressure of his hand as she looked up to him her affirmative answer; and she saw no wrong or harm in the pressure. Lionel closed the door upon her, and returned to his wife.

A change had come over Sibylla. She had thrown herself at full length on a sofa, and was beginning to sob. He went up to her, and spoke gravely, not unkindly, his arms folded before him.

“ Sibylla, when is this line of conduct to cease? I am nearly wearied out—nearly,” he repeated, putting his hand to his brow, “ wearied out. If I could bear the exposure for myself, I cannot bear it for my wife.”

She rose up and sat down on the sofa facing him. The hectic of her cheeks had turned to scarlet.

"You do love her! You care for her more than you care for me. Can you deny it?"

"What part of my conduct has ever told you so?"

"I don't care for conduct," she fractiously retorted. "I remember what papa said, and that's enough. He said he saw how it was in the old days—that you loved her. What business had you to love her?"

"Stay, Sibylla! Carry your reflections back, and answer yourself. In those old days, when both of you were before me to choose—at any rate, to *ask*—I chose *you*, leaving her. Is it not a sufficient answer?"

Sibylla threw back her head on the sofa-frame, and began to cry.

"From the hour that I made you my wife, I have striven to do my duty by you, tenderly as husband can do it. Why do you force me to reiterate this declaration, which I have made before?" he added, his face working with emotion. "Neither by word nor action have I been false to you. I have never for the briefest moment been guilty behind your back of that which I would not be guilty of in your presence. No! my allegiance of duty has never swerved from you. So help me Heaven!"

"You can't swear to me that you don't love her!" was Sibylla's retort.

It appeared that he did not intend to swear it.

He went and stood against the mantel-piece, in his old favourite attitude, leaning his elbow on it and his face upon his hand: a face that betrayed his inward pain. Sibylla began again: to tantalise him seemed a necessity of her life.

"I might have expected trouble when I consented to marry you. Rachel Frost's fate might have taught me the lesson."

"Stay," said Lionel, lifting his head. "It is not the first hint of the sort that you have given me. Tell me honestly what it is you mean."

"You need not ask: you know already. Rachel owed her disgrace to you."

Lionel paused a moment before he rejoined. When he did, it was in a quiet tone.

"Do you speak from your own opinion?"

"No, I don't. The secret was entrusted to me."

"By whom? You must tell me, Sibylla."

"I don't know why I should not," she slowly said, as if in deliberation. "My husband trusted me with it."

"Do you allude to Frederick Massingbird?" asked Lionel, in a tone whose coldness he could not help.

"Yes, I do. He *was* my husband," she resentfully added. "One day, on the voyage to Australia, he dropped a word that made me think he knew something about that business of Rachel's, and I teased him to tell me who it was who had played the rogue. He said it was Lionel Verner."

A pause. But for Lionel's admirable disposition,

how terribly he might have retorted upon her, knowing what he had learnt that day.

"Did he tell you I had completed the roguery by pushing her into the pond?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I don't remember. Perhaps he did."

"And—doubting it—you could marry me!" quietly remarked Lionel.

She made no answer.

"Let me set you right on that point once for all, then," he continued. "I was innocent as you. I had nothing to do with it. Rachel and her father were held in too great respect by my uncle—nay, by me, I may add—for me to offer *her* anything but respect. You were misinformed, Sibylla."

She laughed scornfully. "It is easy to say so."

"As it was for Frederick Massingbird to say to you what he did."

"If it came to the choice," she retorted, "I'd rather believe him than you."

Bitter aggravation lay in her tone, bitter aggravation in her gesture. Was Lionel tempted to forget himself?—to set her right? If so, he beat the temptation down. All men would not have been so forbearing.

"Sibylla, I have told you truth," he simply said.

"Which is as much as to say that Fred told—" she was vehemently beginning when the words were stopped by the entrance of John Massingbird. John, caught in the shower near Deerham Court, made no scruple of running to it for shelter, and

was in time to witness Sibylla's angry tones and inflamed face.

What precisely happened Lionel could never afterwards recal. He remembered John's free and easy salutation, "What's the row?"—he remembered Sibylla's torrent of words in answer. As little given to reticence or delicacy in the presence of her cousin, as she had been in that of Lucy Tempest, she renewed her accusation of her husband with regard to Rachel: she called on him—John—to bear testimony that Fred was truthful. And Lionel remembered little more until he saw Sibylla lying back gasping, the blood pouring from her mouth.

John Massingbird—perhaps in his eagerness to contradict her as much as in his regard to make known the truth—had answered her all too effectually before Lionel could stop him, Words that burnt into the brain of Sibylla Verner, and turned the current of her life's pulses.

It was her husband of that voyage, Frederick Massingbird, who had brought the evil upon Rachel, who had been with her by the pond that night.

As the words left John Massingbird's lips, she rose up, and stood staring at him. Presently she essayed to speak, but not a sound issued from her drawn lips. Whether passion impeded her utterance, or startled dismay, or whether it may have been any physical impediment, it was evident that she could not get the words out.

Fighting her hands on the empty air, fighting for breath or for speech, so she remained for a passing space: and then the blood began to trickle from her mouth. The excitement had caused her to burst a blood-vessel.

Lionel crossed over to her: her best support. He held her in his arms, tenderly and considerately as though she had never given him an unwifely word. Stretching out his other hand to the bell, he rang it loudly. And then he looked at Mr. Massingbird.

"Run for your life," he whispered. "Get Jan here."

CHAPTER XX.

TRYING ON WREATHS.

THE months went on, and Deerham was in a commotion. Not the Clay Lane part of it, of whom I think you have mostly heard, but that more refined if less useful portion, represented by Lady Verner, the Emsleys, the Bitterworths, and other of the aristocracy congregating in its environs.

Summer had long come in, and was now on the wane ; and Sir Edmund Hautley, the only son and heir of Sir Rufus, was expected home. He had quitted the service, had made the overland route, and was now halting in Paris ; but the day of his arrival at Deerham Hall was fixed. And this caused the commotion : for it had pleased Miss Hautley to determine to welcome him with a *fête* and ball, the like of which for splendour had never been heard of in the county.

Miss Hautley was a little given to have an opinion of her own, and to hold to it. Sir Rufus had been the same. Their friends called it firmness ; their enemies obstinacy. The only sister of Sir Rufus, not cordial with him during his life, she had invaded the Hall as soon as the life had left him, quitting her own comfortable and substantial residence

to do it, and persisted in taking up her abode in it until Sir Edmund should return; as she was persisting now in giving this *fête* in honour of it. In vain those who deemed themselves privileged to speak, pointed out to Miss Hautley, that a *fête* might be considered out of place, given before Sir Rufus had been dead a twelve-month, and that Sir Edmund might deem it so; furthermore, that Sir Edmund might prefer to find quietness on his arrival instead of a crowd.

They might as well have talked to the wind, for all the impression it made upon Miss Hautley. The preparations for the gathering went on quickly, the invitations had gone out, and Deerham's head was turned. Those who did not get invitations were ready to swallow up those who did. Miss Hautley was as exclusive as ever proud old Sir Rufus had been, and many were left out who thought they *might* have been invited. Amongst others, the Miss Wests thought so, especially as one card had gone to their house—for Mr. Jan Verner.

Two cards had been left at Deerham Court. For Lady and Miss Verner: for Mr. and Mrs. Verner. By some strange oversight, Miss Tempest was omitted. That it was a simple oversight there was no doubt; and so it turned out to be. For, after the *fête* was over, reserved old Miss Hautley condescended to explain that it was, and to apologise; but this is dating forward. It was not known to

be an oversight when the cards arrived, and Lady Verner felt inclined to resent it. She hesitated whether to treat it resentfully and stay away herself; or to take no notice of it, farther than by conveying Lucy to the Hall in place of Decima.

Lucy laughed. She did not seem to care at all for the omission: but as to going without the invitation, or in anybody's place, she would not hear of it.

"Decima will not mind staying at home," said Lady Verner. "She never cares to go out. You will not care to go, will you, Decima?"

An unwonted flush of crimson rose to Decima's usually calm face. "I should like to go to this, mamma; as Miss Hautley has invited me."

"*Like* to go to it!" repeated Lady Verner. "Are you growing capricious, Decima? You generally profess to 'like' to stay at home."

"I would rather go this time, if you have no objection," was the quiet answer of Decima.

"Dear Lady Verner, if Decima remained at home ever so, I should not go," interposed Lucy. "Only fancy my intruding there without an invitation! Miss Hautley might order me out again."

"It is well to make a joke of it, Lucy, when I am vexed," said Lady Verner. "I daresay it is only a mistake; but I don't like such mistakes."

"I daresay it is nothing else," replied Lucy, laughing. "But as to making my appearance there under the circumstances, I could not really

do it to oblige even you, Lady Verner. And I would just as soon be at home."

Lady Verner resigned herself to the decision, but she did not look pleased.

"It is to be I and Decima, then. Lionel"—glancing across the table at him—"you will accompany me. I cannot go without you."

It was at the luncheon table they were discussing this: a meal of which Lionel rarely partook; in fact, he was rarely at home to partake of it; but he happened to be there to-day. Sibylla was present. Recovered from the accident—if it may be so called—of the breaking of the blood-vessel; she had appeared to grow stronger and better with the summer weather. Jan knew the improvement was all deceit, and told them so; told *her* so; that the very greatest caution was necessary, if she would avert a second similar attack; in fact, half the time of Jan's visits at Deerham Court was spent in enjoining perfect tranquillity on Sibylla.

But she was so obstinate! She would not keep herself quiet: she would go out; she would wear those thin summer dresses, low in the evening. She is wearing a delicate muslin now, as she sits by Lady Verner, and her blue eyes are suspiciously bright, and her cheeks are suspiciously hectic, and the old laboured breath can be seen through the muslin moving her chest up and down, as it used to be seen. A lovely vision still, with her golden hair clustering about her; but her hands are hot and trembling, and her frame is painfully thin. Cer-

tainly she does not look fit to enter upon evening gaiety, and Lady Verner in addressing her son, "You will go with me, Lionel," proved that she never so much as cast a thought to the improbability that Sibylla would venture thither.

"If—you—particularly wish it, mother," was Lionel's reply, spoken with hesitation.

"Do you not wish to go?" rejoined Lady Verner.

"I would very much prefer not," he replied.

"Nonsense, Lionel! I don't think you have gone out once since you left Verner's Pride. Staying at home won't mend matters. I *wish* you to go with me; I shall make a point of it."

Lady Verner spoke with some irritation, and Lionel said no more. He supposed he must acquiesce.

It was no long-timed invitation of weeks. The cards arrived on the Monday, and the *fête* was for the following Thursday. Lionel thought no more about it; he was not as the ladies, whose toilettes would take all of that time to prepare. On the Wednesday, Decima took him aside.

"Lionel, do you know that Mrs. Verner intends to go to-morrow evening?"

Lionel paused: paused from surprise.

"You must be mistaken, Decima. She sent a refusal."

"I fancy that she did not send a refusal. And I feel sure she is thinking of going. You will not judge that I am unwarrantably interfering," Decima added, in a tone of deprecation. "I would not do

such a thing. But I thought it was right to apprise you of this. She is not well enough to go out."

With a pressure of the hand on his sister's shoulder, and a few muttered words of dismay, which she did not catch, Lionel sought his wife. No need of questioning, to confirm the truth of what Decima had said: Sibylla was figuring off before the glass, after the manner of her girlish days, with a wreath of white flowers on her head. It was her own sitting-room, the pretty room of the blue and white panels; and the tables and chairs were laden with other wreaths, with various head ornaments. She was trying their different effect, when, on turning round her head as the door opened, she saw it was her husband. His presence did not appear to discompose her, and she continued to place the wreath to her satisfaction, pulling it here and there with her thin and trembling hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Lionel.

"Trying on wreaths," she replied.

"So I perceive. But why?"

"To see which suits me best. This looks too white for me, does it not?" she added, turning her countenance towards him.

If to be the same hue as the complexion was "too white," it certainly did look so. The dead white of the roses was not more utterly colourless than Sibylla's face. She was like a ghost: she often looked so now.

"Sibylla," he said, without answering her question, "you are surely not thinking of going to Sir Edmund's to-morrow night?"

"Yes I am."

"You said you would write a refusal?"

"I know I *said* it. I saw how crossgrained you were going to be over it, and that's why I said it to you. I accepted the invitation."

"But, my dear, you must not go!"

Sibylla was flinging off the white wreath, and taking up a pink one, which she began to fix in her hair. She did not answer.

"After all," deliberated she, "I have a great mind to wear pearls. Not a wreath at all."

"Sibylla! I say you *must* not go."

"Now Lionel, it is of no use your talking. I have made up my mind to go; I did at first; and go I shall. Don't you remember," she continued, turning her face from the glass towards him, her careless tone changing for one of sharpness, "that papa said I must not be crossed?"

"But you are not in a state to go out," remonstrated Lionel. "Jan forbids it utterly."

"Jan? Jan's in your pay. He says what you tell him to say."

"Child, how can you give utterance to such things?" he asked in a tone of emotion. "When Jan interdicts your going out he has only your welfare at heart. And you *know* that I have it. Evening air and scenes of excitement are equally pernicious for you."

"I shall go," returned Sibylla. "You are going, you know," she resentfully said. "I wonder you don't propose that I shall be locked up at home in a dark closet, while you are there, dancing."

A moment's deliberation in his mind, and a rapid resolution. "I shall not go, Sibylla," he rejoined. "I shall stay at home with you."

"Who says you are going to stay at home?"

"I say it myself. I intend to do so. I shall do so."

"Oh. Since when, pray, have you come to that decision?"

Had she not the penetration to see that he had come to it then; then, as he talked to her; that he had come to it for her sake? That she should not have it to say he went out while she was at home. Perhaps she did see it: but it was nearly impossible to Sibylla not to indulge in bitter aggravating retorts.

"I understand!" she continued, throwing up her head with an air of supreme scorn. "Thank you, don't trouble. I am not too ill to stoop, ill as you wish to make me out to be."

In displacing the wreath on her head to a different position, she had let it fall, Lionel's stooping to pick it up had called forth the last remark. As he handed it to her he took her hand.

"Sibylla, promise me to think no more of this. Do give it up."

"I won't give it up," she vehemently answered. "I shall go. And, what's more, I shall dance."

Lionel quitted her and sought his mother. Lady Verner was not very well that afternoon, and was keeping her room. He found her in an invalid chair.

"Mother, I have come to tell you that I cannot accompany you to-morrow evening," he said. "You must please excuse me."

"Why so?" asked Lady Verner.

"I would so very much rather not go," he answered. "Besides, I do not care to leave Sibylla."

Lady Verner made no observation for a few moments. A curious smile, almost a pitying smile, was hovering on her lips.

"Lionel, you are a model husband. Your father was not a bad one, as husbands go; but—he would not have bent his neck to such treatment from me, as you take from Mrs. Verner."

"No?" returned Lionel, with good humour.

"It is not right of you, Lionel, to leave me to go alone, with only Decima."

"Let Jan accompany you, mother."

"*Jan!*" uttered Lady Verner, in the very extreme of astonishment. "I should be surprised to see Jan attempt to enter such a scene. *Jan!* I don't suppose he possesses a fit coat and waist-coat."

Lionel smiled, quitted his mother, and bent his steps towards Jan Verner's.

Not to solicit Jan's attendance upon Lady Verner to the festival scene, or to make close inquiries as

to the state of Jan's wardrobe. No; Lionel had a more serious motive for his visit.

He found Jan and Master Cheese enjoying a sort of battle. The surgery looked as if it had been turned upside down, so much confusion reigned. White earthenware vessels of every shape and form, glass jars, huge cylinders, brass pots, metal pans, were scattered about in inextricable confusion. Master Cheese had recently got up a taste for chemical experiments, in which it appeared necessary to call into requisition an unlimited quantity of accessories in the apparatus line. He had been entering upon an experiment that afternoon, when Jan came unexpectedly in, and caught him.

Not for the litter and confusion was Jan displeased, but because he found that Master Cheese had so bungled chemical properties in his head, so confounded one dangerous substance with another, that, five minutes later, the result would probably have been the blowing off of the surgery roof, and Master Cheese and his vessels with it. Jan was giving him a sharp and decisive word, not to attempt anything of the sort again, until he could bring more correct knowledge to bear upon it, when Lionel interrupted them.

"I want to speak to you, Jan," he said.

"Here, you be off, and wash the powder from your hands," cried Jan to Master Cheese, who was looking ruefully cross. "I'll put the things straight."

The young gentleman departed. Lionel sat down on the only chair he could see—one probably kept

for the accommodation of patients who might want a few teeth drawn. Jan was rapidly reducing the place to order.

"What is it, Lionel?" he asked, when it was pretty clear.

"Jan, you must see Sibylla. She wants to go to Deerham Hall to-morrow night."

"She can't go," replied Jan. "Nonsense."

"But she says she will go."

Jan leaned his long body over the counter, and brought his face nearly on a level with Lionel's, speaking slowly and impressively—

"If she goes, Lionel, it will kill her."

Lionel rose to depart. He was on his way to Verner's Pride. "I called in to tell you this, Jan, and to ask you to step up and remonstrate with her."

"Very well," said Jan. "Mark me, Lionel, *she must not go*. And if there's no other way of keeping her away, you, her husband, must forbid it. A little more excitement than usual, and there'll be another vessel of the lungs ruptured. If that happens, nothing can save her life. Keep her at home, by force if necessary: any way keep her."

"And what of the excitement that that will cause?" questioned Lionel. "It may be as fatal as the other."

"I don't know," returned Jan, speaking for once in his life testily, in the vexation the difficulty brought him. "My belief is, that Sibylla's mad. She'd never be so stupid, were she sane."

"Go to her, and see what you can do," concluded Lionel, as he turned away.

Jan proceeded to Deerham Court, and had an interview with Mrs. Verner. It was not of a very agreeable nature, neither did much satisfaction ensue from it. After a few recriminating retorts to Jan's arguments, which he received as equably as though they had been compliments, Sibylla subsided into sullen silence. And when Jan left, he could not tell whether she still persisted in her project, or whether she gave it up.

CHAPTER XXI.

WELL NIGH WEARIED OUT.

LIONEL returned late in the evening: he had been detained at Verner's Pride. Sibylla appeared sullen still. She was in her own sitting room, upstairs, and Lucy was bearing her company. Decima was in Lady Verner's chamber.

"Have you had any dinner?" inquired Lucy. *She* did not ask. She would not have asked had he been starving.

"I took a bit with John Massingbird," he replied. "Is my mother better, do you know?"

"Not much, I think," said Lucy. "Decima is sitting with her."

Lionel stood in his old attitude, his elbow on the mantelpiece by his wife's side, looking down at her. Her eyes were suspiciously bright, her cheeks now shone with their most crimson hectic. It was often the case at this, the twilight hour of the evening. She wore a low dress, and the gold chain on her neck rose and fell with every breath. Lucy's neck was uncovered, too: a fair, pretty neck; one that did not give you the shudders when looked at as poor Sibylla's did. Sibylla leaned back on the cushions of her chair, toying with a fragile hand-

screen of feathers: Lucy, sitting on the opposite side had been reading; but she laid the book down when Lionel entered.

"John Massingbird desired me to ask you, Sibylla, if he should send you the first plate of grapes they cut."

"I'd rather have the first bag of walnuts they shake," answered Sibylla. "I never cared for grapes."

"He can send you both," said Lionel: but an uncomfortable, dim recollection came over him, of Jan's having told her she must not eat walnuts. For Jan to tell her not to do a thing, however—or, in fact, for anybody else—was the sure signal for Sibylla to do it.

"Does John Massingbird intend to go to-morrow evening?" inquired Sibylla.

"To Deerham Hall, do you mean? John Massingbird has not received an invitation."

"What's that for?" quickly asked Sibylla.

"Some whim of Miss Hautley's, I suppose. The cards have been issued very partially. John says it is just as well he did not get one, for he should, either not have responded to it, or else made his appearance there with his clay pipe."

Lucy laughed.

"He is glad to be left out," continued Lionel. "It saves him the trouble of a refusal. I don't think any ball would get John Massingbird to it; unless he could be received in what he calls his diggings toggery."

"I'd not have gone with him ; I don't like him well enough," resentfully spoke Sibylla ; "but as he is not going, he can let me have the loan of my own carriage—at least, the carriage that was my own. I dislike those old hired things."

The words struck on Lionel like a knell. He foresaw trouble. "Sibylla," he gravely said, "I have been speaking to Jan. He—"

"Yes, you have !" she vehemently interrupted, her pent-up anger bursting forth. "You went to him, and sent him here, and told him what to say,—all on purpose to cross me. It is wicked of you to be so jealous of my having a little pleasure."

"Jealous of—I don't understand you, Sibylla."

"You won't understand me, you mean. Never mind ! never mind !"

"Sibylla," he said, bending his head slightly towards her, and speaking in low, persuasive accents, "I *cannot* let you go to-morrow night. If I cared for you less, I might suffer you to risk it. I have given up going, and—"

"You never meant to go," she interrupted.

"Yes I did : to please my mother. But that is of no consequence—"

"I tell you, you never meant to go, Lionel Verner !" she passionately burst forth, her cheeks flaming. "You are stopping at home on purpose to be with Lucy Tempest. An arranged plan between you and her. Her society is more to you than any you'd find at Deerham Hall."

Lucy looked up with a start—a sort of shiver—

her sweet brown eyes open with innocent wonder. Then the full sense of the words appeared to penetrate to her, and her face grew hot with a glowing, scarlet flush. She said nothing. She rose quietly, not hurriedly, took up the book she had put on the table, and quietly left the room.

Lionel's face was glowing, too,—glowing with the red blood of indignation. He bit his lips for calmness, leaving the mark there for hours. He strove manfully with his angry spirit: it was rising up to open rebellion. A minute, and the composure of self-control came to him. He stood before his wife, his arms folded.

"You are my wife," he said. "I am bound to defend, to excuse you so far as I may; but these insults to Lucy Tempest I cannot excuse. She is the daughter of my dead father's dearest friend; she is living here under the protection of my mother, and it is incumbent upon me to put a stop to these scenes, so far as she is concerned. If I cannot do it in one way, I must in another."

"You know she and you would like to stay at home together—and get the rest of us out."

"Be silent!" he said, in a sterner tone than he had ever used to her. "You cannot reflect upon what you are saying. Accuse me as you please; I will bear it patiently, if I can; but Miss Tempest must be spared. You *know* how utterly unfounded are such thoughts; you know that she is refined, gentle, single-hearted; that all her thoughts to you, as my wife, are those of friendship and kind-

ness. What would my mother think were she to hear this?"

Sibylla made no reply.

" You have never seen a look or heard a word pass between me and Lucy Tempest that was not of the most open nature, entirely compatible with her position, that of a modest and refined gentlewoman, and of mine, as your husband. I think you must be mad, Sibylla."

The words Jan had used. If such temperaments do not deserve the name of madness, they are near akin to it. Lionel spoke with emotion: it all but over-mastered him, and he went back to his place by the mantelpiece, his chest heaving.

" I shall leave this residence as speedily as may be," he said, " giving some trivial excuse to my mother for the step. I see no other way to put an end to this."

Sibylla, her mood changing, burst into tears. " I don't want to leave it," she said, quite in a humble tone.

He was not inclined for argument. He had rapidly made his mind up, believing it was the only course open to him. He must go away with his wife, and so leave the house in peace. Saying something [to that effect,] he quitted the room, leaving Sibylla sobbing fractiously on the pillow of the chair.

He went down to the drawing-room. He did not care where he went, or what became of him: it is an unhappy thing when affairs grow to that miserable

pitch, that the mind has neither ease nor comfort any where. At the first moment of entering, he thought the room was empty, but as his eyes grew accustomed to the dusk, he discerned the form of some one standing at the distant window. It was Lucy Tempest. Lionel went straight up to her: he felt that some apology or notice from him was due. She was crying bitterly, and turned to him before he could speak.

"Mr. Verner, I feel my position keenly. I would not remain here to make things unpleasant to your wife, for the whole world. But I cannot help myself. I have nowhere to go until papa shall return to Europe."

"Lucy, let me say a word to you," he whispered, his tones impeded, his breath coming thick and fast from his hot and crimsoned lips. "There are moments in a man's lifetime when he must *be true*; when the artificial gloss thrown on social intercourse fades out of sight. This is one."

Her tears fell more quietly. "I am so very sorry?" she continued to murmur.

"Were you other than what you are I might meet you with some of this artifice; I might pretend not to know aught of what has been said; I might attempt some elaborate apology. It would be worse than folly from me to you. Let me tell you, that could I have shielded you from this insult with my life, I would have done it."

"Yes, yes," she hurriedly answered.

"You will not mistake me. As the daughter of

my father's dearest friend, as my mother's honoured guest, I speak to you. I speak to you as one whom I am bound to protect from harm and insult, only in a less degree than I would protect my wife. You will do me the justice to believe it."

"I know it. Indeed I do not blame you."

"Lucy, I would have prevented this, had it been in my power. But it was not. I could not help it. All I can do, is to take steps that it shall not occur again in the future. I scarcely know what I am saying to you. My life, what with one thing and another, is well-nigh wearied out."

Lucy had long seen that. But she did not say so.

"It will not be long now before papa is at home," she answered, "and then I shall leave Deerham Court free. Thank you for speaking to me," she simply said, as she was turning to leave the room.

He took both her hands in his; he drew her nearer to him, his head was bent down to hers, his whole frame shook with emotion. Was he tempted to take a caress from her sweet face, as he had taken it years ago? Perhaps he was. But Lionel Verner was not one to lose his self-control where there was real necessity for his retaining it. His position was different now from what it had been then; and, if the temptation was strong, it was kept in check, and Lucy never knew it had been there.

"You will forget it for my sake, Lucy? You will not resent it upon her? She is very ill."

"It is what I wish to do," she gently said. "I

do not know what foolish things I might not say, were I suffering like Mrs. Verner."

"God bless you for ever, Lucy!" he murmured. "May your future life be more fortunate than mine is."

Relinquishing her hands, he watched her disappear through the darkness of the room. She was dearer to him than his own life; he loved her better than all earthly things. That the knowledge was all too palpable then, he was bitterly feeling, and he could not suppress it. He could neither suppress the knowledge, nor the fact; it had been very present with him for long and long. He could not help it, as he said. He believed, in his honest heart, that he had not encouraged the passion; that it had taken root and spread unconsciously to himself. He would have driven it away, had it been in his power; he would drive it away now, could he do it by any amount of energy or will. But it could not be. And Lionel Verner leaned in the dark there against the window frame, resolving to do as he had done before—had done all along. To suppress it ever; to ignore it so far as might be; and to do his duty as honestly and lovingly by his wife, as though the love were not there.

He *had* been enabled to do this hitherto, and he would still: God helping him.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOING TO THE BALL.

IT was the day of the *fête* at Deerham Hall. Sibylla awoke in an amiable mood, unusually so for her ; and Lionel, as he dressed, talked to her gravely and kindly, urging upon her the necessity of relinquishing her determination to be present. It appeared that she was also reasonable that morning, as well as amiable, for she listened to him, and at length voluntarily said she would think no more about it.

"But you must afford me some treat in place of it," she immediately added. "Will you promise to take me for a whole day next week to Heartburg?"

"Willingly," replied Lionel. "There is to be a morning concert at Heartburg next Tuesday. If you feel well enough, we can attend that."

He did not think morning concerts, and the fatigue they sometimes entail, particularly desirable things for his wife ; but, compared with hot ball-rooms and the night air, they seemed innocuous. Sibylla liked morning concerts uncommonly, nearly as much as Master Cheese liked tarts : she liked anything that afforded an apology for dress and display.

"Mind, Lionel, you *promise* to take me," she reiterated.

"Yes. Provided you feel equal to going."

Sibylla took breakfast in her own room, according to custom. Formerly, she had done so through idleness: now, she was really not well enough to rise early. Lionel, when he joined the family breakfast table, announced the news: announced it in his own characteristic manner.

"Sibylla thinks, after all, that she will be better at home, this evening," he said. "I am glad she has so decided it."

"Her senses have come to her, have they?" remarked Lady Verner.

He made no reply. He never did make a reply to any shaft lanced by Lady Verner at his wife. My lady was sparing of her shafts in a general way since they had resided with her, but she did throw one out now and then.

"You will go with me, then, Lionel?"

He shook his head, telling his mother she must excuse him: it was not his intention to be present.

Sibylla continued in a remarkably quiet, not to say affable, temper all day. Lionel was out, but returned home to dinner. By-and-by Lady Verner and Decima retired to dress. Lucy went up with Decima, and Lionel remained with his wife.

When they came down, Sibylla was asleep on the sofa. Lady Verner wore some of the magnificent and yet quiet attire that had pertained to her gayer days; Decima was in white. Lionel put on his hat,

and went out to hand them into the carriage that waited. As he did so, the aspect of his sister's face struck him.

"What is the matter, Decima?" he exclaimed.
"You are looking perfectly white."

She only smiled in answer: a forced, unnatural smile, as it appeared to Lionel. But he said no more: he thought the white hue might be only the shade cast by the moonlight. Lady Verner looked from the carriage to ask a question.

"Is Jan really going, do you know, Lionel? Lucy says she thinks he is. I do hope and trust that he will be attired like a Christian, if he is absurd enough to appear."

"I think I'll go and see," answered Lionel, a smile crossing his face. "Take care, Catherine!"

Old Catherine, who had come out with shawls, was dangerously near the wheels—and the horses were on the point of starting. She stepped back, and the carriage drove on.

The bustle had aroused Sibylla. She rose to look from the window: saw the carriage depart, saw Catherine come in, saw Lionel walk away towards Deerham. It was all clear in the moonlight. Lucy Tempest was looking from the other window.

"What a lovely night it is!" Lucy exclaimed. "I should not mind a drive of ten miles, such a night as this."

"And yet they choose to say that going out would hurt me!" spoke Sibylla, in a resentful tone. "They do it on purpose to vex me."

Lucy chose to ignore the subject: it was not her business to enter into it one way or the other. She felt that Mrs. Verner had done perfectly right in remaining at home; that her strength would have been found unequal to support the heat and excitement of a ball-room, following on the night air of the transit to it. Lovely as the night was, it was cold: for some few evenings past the gardeners had complained of frost.

Lucy drew from the window with a half sigh: it seemed almost a pity to shut out that pleasant moonlight: turned, and stirred the fire into a blaze. Sibylla's chilly nature caused them to enter upon evening fires before other people thought of them.

"Shall I ring for lights, Mrs. Verner?"

"I suppose it's time, and past time," was Sibylla's answer. "I must have been asleep ever so long."

Catherine brought them in. The man-servant had gone in attendance on his mistress. The moderate household of Lady Verner consisted now but of four domestics; Thérèse, Catherine, the cook, and the man.

"Shall I bring tea in, Miss Lucy?" asked Catherine.

Lucy turned her eyes on Sibylla. "Would you like tea now, Mrs. Verner?"

"No," answered Sibylla. "Not yet."

She left the room as she spoke. Catherine, who had been lowering the curtains, followed next. Lucy drew a chair to the fire, sat down, and fell into a reverie.

She was aroused by the door opening again. It proved to be Catherine with the tea-things. "I thought I'd bring them in, and then they'll be ready," remarked she. "You can please to ring, miss, when you want the urn."

Lucy simply nodded, and Catherine returned to the kitchen, to enjoy a social *tête-à-tête* supper with the cook. Mademoiselle Thérèse, taking advantage of her mistress's absence, had gone out for the rest of the evening. The two servants sat on and chatted together: so long, that Catherine openly wondered at the urn's not being called for.

"They must both have gone to sleep, I should think," quoth she. Miss Lucy over the fire in the sitting-room, and Mr. Lionel's wife over hers, upstairs. I have not heard her come down——"

Catherine stopped. The cook had started up, her eyes fixed on the doorway. Catherine, whose back was towards it, hastily turned; and an involuntary exclamation broke from her lips.

Standing there was Mrs. Verner: looking like—like a bedecked skeleton. She was in fairy attire. A gossamer robe of white with shining ornaments, and a wreath that seemed to sparkle with glittering dewdrops on her head. But her arms were thin, wasted; and the bones of her poor neck seemed to rattle as they heaved painfully under the gems clasped round it; and her face had not so much as the faintest tinge of hectic, but was utterly colourless: worse; it was wan, ghastly. A distressing sight to look upon, was she, as she stood there: she

and the festal attire were so completely at variance. She came forward, before the servants could recover from their astonishment.

"Where's Richard?" she asked, speaking in a low, subdued tone, as if fearing to be heard—though there was nobody in the house to hear her, save Lucy Tempest. And probably it was from her wish to avoid all attention to her proceeding, that caused her to come down stealthily to the servants, instead of ringing for them.

"Richard is not come back, ma'am," answered Catherine. "We have just been saying that he'll most likely stop up there with the Hall servants until my lady returns."

"Not back!" echoed Sibylla. "Cook, you must go out for me," she imperiously added, after a moment's pause. "Go to Dean's and order one of their flys here directly. Wait, and come back with it."

The cook, a simple sort of young woman, save in her own special department, did not demur, or appear to question in the least the expediency of the order. Catherine questioned it very much indeed; but while she hesitated what to do, whether to stop the cook, or to venture on a remonstrance to Mrs. Verner, or to appeal to Miss Tempest to do it, the cook was gone. Servants are not particular in country places, and the girl went straight out as she was, not staying to put anything on.

Sibylla appeared to be shivering. She took up her place right in front of the fire, holding out her

hands to the blaze. Her teeth chattered, her whole frame trembled.

"The fire in my dressing-room went out," she remarked. "Take care that you make up a large one by the time I return."

"You'll never go, ma'am!" cried old Catherine, breaking through her reserve. "You are not strong enough."

"Mind your own business," sharply retorted Sibylla. "Do you think I don't know my own feelings, whether I am strong, or whether I am not? I am as strong as you."

Catherine dared no more. Sibylla cowered over the fire, her head turned sideways as she glanced on the table.

"What's that?" she suddenly cried, pointing to the contents of a jug.

"It's beer, ma'am," answered Catherine. "That stupid girl drew just as much as if Richard and Thérèse had been at home. Maybe Thérèse will be in yet for supper."

"Give me a glass of it. I am thirsty."

Again old Catherine hesitated. Malt liquor had been expressly forbidden to Mrs. Verner. It made her cough frightfully.

"You know, ma'am, the doctors have said——"

"Will you hold your tongue? And give me what I require? You are as bad as Mr. Verner."

Catherine reached a tumbler, poured it half full, and handed it. Mrs. Verner did not take it.

"Fill it," she said.

So old Catherine, much against her will, had to fill it, and Sibylla drained the glass to the very bottom. In truth, she was continually thirsty: she seemed to have a perpetual inward fever upon her. Her shoulders were shivering as she set down the glass.

"Go and find my opera cloak, Catherine. It must have dropped on the stairs. I know I put it on as I left my room."

Catherine quitted the kitchen on the errand. She would have liked to close the door after her; but it happened to be pushed quite back with a chair against it; and the pointedly shutting it might have been noticed by Sibylla. She found the opera cloak lying on the landing, near Sibylla's bedroom door. Catching it up, she slipped off her shoes at the same moment, stole down noiselessly, and went into the presence of Miss Tempest.

Lucy looked astonished. She sat at the table reading, waiting with all patience the entrance of Sibylla, ere she made tea. To see Catherine steal in covertly with her finger to her lips, excited her wonder.

"Miss Lucy, she's going to the ball," was the old servant's salutation, as she approached close to Lucy, and spoke in the faintest whisper. "She is shivering over the kitchen fire, with hardly a bit of gown to her back, so far as warmth goes. Here's her opera cloak: she dropped it coming down. Cook's gone out for a fly."

Lucy felt startled. "Do you mean Mrs. Verner?"

"Why, of course I do," answered Catherine. "She has been up-stairs all this while, and has dressed herself alone. She must not go, Miss Lucy. She's looking like a ghost. What will Mr. Verner say to us if we let her! It may just be her death."

Lucy clasped her hands in her consternation. "Catherine, what can we do? We have no influence over her. She would not listen to us for a moment. If we could but find Mr. Verner!"

"He was going round to Mr. Jan's when my lady drove off. I heard him say it. Miss Lucy, *I* can't go after him: she'd find me out: I can't leave her, or leave the house. But he ought to be got here."

Did the woman's words point to the suggestion that Lucy should go? Lucy may have thought it: or, perhaps, she entered on the suggestion of her own accord.

"I will go, Catherine," she whispered. "I don't mind it. It is nearly as light as day outside, and I shall soon be at Mr. Jan's. You go back to Mrs. Verner."

Feeling that there was not a moment to be lost; feeling that Mrs. Verner ought to be stopped at all hazards for her own sake, Lucy caught up a shawl and a green sun-bonnet of Lady Verner's that happened to be in the hall, and, thus hastily attired, went out. Speeding swiftly along the moonlit road,

she soon gained Deerham, and turned to the house of Dr. West. A light in the surgery guided her at once to that room.

But the light was there alone. Nobody was present to reap its benefit or to answer intruders. Lucy knocked pretty loudly on the counter without bringing forth any result. Apparently she was not heard: perhaps from the fact that the sound was drowned in the noise of some fizzing and popping which seemed to be going on in the next room—Jan's bed-room. Her consideration for Mrs. Verner put ceremony out of the question: in fact, Lucy was not given at the best of times to stand much upon that: and she stepped round the counter, and knocked briskly at the door. Possibly Lionel might be in there with Jan.

Lionel was not there; nor Jan, either. The door was gingerly opened about two inches by Master Cheese, who was enveloped in a great white apron and white oversleeves. His face looked red and confused as it peeped out, as does that of one who is caught at some forbidden mischief: and Lucy obtained sight of a perfect mass of vessels, brass, earthenware, glass, and other things, with which the room was strewed. In point of fact, Master Cheese, believing he was safe from Jan's superintendence for some hours, had seized upon the occasion to plunge into his forbidden chemical researches again, and had taken French leave to use Jan's bed-room for the purpose, the surgery being limited for space.

"What do you want?" cried he roughly, staring at Lucy.

"Is Mr. Verner here?" she asked.

Then Master Cheese knew the voice, and condescended a sort of apology for his abruptness.

"I didn't know you, Miss Tempest, in that fright of a bonnet," said he, walking forth and closing the bed-room door behind him. "Mr. Verner's not here."

"Do you happen to know where he is?" asked Lucy. "He said he was coming here, an hour ago."

"So he did come here; and saw Jan. Jan's gone to the ball. And Miss Deb and Miss Amilly are gone to a party at Heartburg."

"Is he?" returned Lucy, referring to Jan, and surprised to hear the news; balls not being in Jan's line.

"I can't make it out," remarked Master Cheese. "He and Sir Edmund used to be cronies, I think; so I suppose that has taken him. But I am glad they are all off: it gives me a whole evening to myself. He and Mr. Verner went away together."

"I wish very much to find Mr. Verner," said Lucy. "It is of great consequence that I should see him. I suppose—you—could not—go and look for him, Master Cheese?" she added, pleadingly.

"Couldn't do it," responded Master Cheese, thinking of his forbidden chemicals. "When Jan's away I am chief, you know, Miss Tempest. Some

cases of broken legs may be brought in, for anything I can tell."

Lucy wished him good-night and turned away. She hesitated at the corner of the street, gazing up and down. To start on a search for Lionel, appeared to be about as hopeful a project as that search renowned in proverb, the looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. The custom in Deerham was, not to light the lamps on a moonlight night, so the street, as Lucy glanced on either side, lay white and quiet; no glare to disturb its peace, save from some shops, not yet closed. Mrs. Duff's, opposite, was among the latter catalogue: and her son, Mr. Dan, appeared to be taking a little tumbling recreation on the flags before the bay window. Lucy crossed over to him.

"Dan," said she, "do you happen to have seen Mr. Verner pass lately?"

Dan, just then on his head, turned himself upside down, and alighted on his feet, humble and subdued. "Please, miss, I see'd him awhile agone along of Mr. Jan," was the answer, pulling his hair by way of salutation. "They went that way. Mr. Jan was all in black, he was."

The boy pointed towards Deerham Court, towards Deerham Hall. There was little doubt that Jan was then on his way to the latter. But the question for Lucy was—where had Lionel gone?

She could not tell: the very speculation upon it was unprofitable, since it could lead to no certainty. Lucy turned homewards, walking quickly.

She had got past the houses, when she discerned, before her in the distance, a form which instinct—perhaps some dearer feeling—told her was that of him of whom she was in search. He was walking with a slow, leisurely step towards his home. Lucy's heart gave a bound—that it did so still at his sight, as it had done in the earlier days, was no fault of hers: Heaven knew that she had striven and prayed against it. When she caught him up she was out of breath, so swiftly had she sped.

"Lucy!" he exclaimed. "*Lucy!* What do you do here?"

"I came out to look for you," she simply said: "there was nobody else at home to come. I went to Jan's, thinking you might be there. Mrs. Verner has dressed herself to go to Sir Edmund's. You may be in time to stop her, if you make haste."

With a half-uttered exclamation, Lionel was speeding off, when he appeared to remember Lucy. He turned to take her with him.

"No," said Lucy, stopping. "I could not go as quickly as you: and a minute, more or less, may make all the difference. There is nothing to hurt me. You make the best of your way. It is for your wife's sake."

There was good sense in all she said, and Lionel started off with a fleet foot. Before Lucy had quite gained the Court, she saw him coming back to meet her. He drew her hand within his arm in silence, and kept his own upon it for an instant's grateful pressure.

"Thank you, Lucy, for what you have done. Thank you now and ever. I was too late."

"Is Mrs. Verner gone?"

"She has been gone these ten minutes past, Catherine says. A fly was found immediately."

They turned into the house; into the sitting-room. Lucy threw off the large shawl and the shapeless green bonnet: at any other moment she would have laughed at the figure she must have looked in them. The tea-things still waited on the table.

"Shall I make you some tea?" she asked.

Lionel shook his head. "I must go up and dress. I shall go after Sibylla."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DECIMA'S ROMANCE.

If the fair forms crowding to the *fête* at Deerham Hall had but known how near that *fête* was to being shorn of its master's presence, they had gone less hopefully. Scarcely one of the dowagers and chaperones bidden to it, but cast a longing eye to the heir, for their daughters' sake; scarcely a daughter but experienced a fluttering of the heart, as the fond fancy presented itself that she might be singled out for the chosen partner of Sir Edmund Hautley: for the night, at any rate; and—perhaps—for the long night of the future. But when the clock struck six that evening, Sir Edmund Hautley had not arrived.

Miss Hautley was in a fever,—as nearly in one as it is in the nature of a cold single lady of fifty-eight to go, when some overwhelming disappointment falls abruptly. According to arranged plans, Sir Edmund was to have been at home by middle day, crossing by the night boat from the Continent. Middle day came and went; afternoon came and went; evening came—and he had not come. Miss Hautley would have set the telegraph to work, had she known where to set it to.

But good luck was in store for her. A train, arriving between six and seven, brought him; and his carriage—the carriage of his late father, which had been waiting at the station since eleven o'clock in the morning—conveyed him home.

Very considerably astonished was Sir Edmund to find the programme which had been carved out for the night's amusement. He did not like it; it jarred upon his sense of propriety; and he spoke a hint of this to Miss Hautley. It was the death of his father which had called him home; a father with whom he had lived for the last few years of his life upon terms of estrangement—at any rate, upon one point; was it seemly that his inauguration should be one of gaiety? Yes, Miss Hautley decisively answered. Their friends were not meeting to bewail Sir Rufus's death; *that* took place months ago; but to welcome his, Sir Edmund's, return, and his entrance on his inheritance.

Sir Edmund—a sunny-tempered, yielding man, the very opposite in spirit to his dead father, to his live aunt—conceded the point; doing it with all the better grace, perhaps, that there was now no help for it. In an hour's time the guests would be arriving. Miss Hautley inquired curiously as to the point upon which he and Sir Rufus had been at issue: she had never been able to learn it from Sir Rufus. Neither did it now appear that she was likely to learn it from Sir Edmund. It was a private matter, he said, a smile crossing his lips as he spoke: one entirely between himself and his

father, and he could not speak of it. It had driven him abroad she believed, Miss Hautley remarked, vexed that she was still to remain in the dark. Yes, acquiesced Sir Edmund : it had driven him abroad and kept him there.

He was ready, and stood in his place to receive his guests ; a tall man, of some five-and-thirty years, with a handsome face and pleasant smile upon it. He greeted his old friends cordially, those with whom he had been intimate, and was laughing and talking with the Countess of Elmsley when the announcement "Lady and Miss Verner" caught his ear.

It caused him to turn abruptly. Breaking off in the midst of a sentence, he quitted the countess and went to meet those who had entered. Lady Verner's greeting was a somewhat elaborate one, and he looked round impatiently for Decima.

She stood in the shade behind her mother. Decima ? Was *that* Decima ? What had she done to her cheeks ? They wore the crimson hectic which were all too characteristic of Sibylla's. Sir Edmund took her hand.

"I trust you are well?"

"Quite well, thank you," was her murmured answer, drawing away the hand which had barely touched his.

Nothing could be more quiet than the meeting, nothing more simple than the words spoken : nothing, it may be said, more commonplace. But that Decima was suffering from some intense

agitation, there could be no doubt: and the next moment her face had turned of that same ghastly hue which had startled her brother Lionel when he was handing her into the carriage. Sir Edmund continued speaking with them a few minutes, and then was called off to receive other guests.

"Have you forgotten how to dance, Edmund?"

The question came from Miss Hautley, disturbing him as he made the centre of a group to whom he was speaking of his Indian life.

"I don't suppose I have," he said, turning to her. "Why?"

"People are thinking so," said Miss Hautley. "The music has been bursting out into fresh attempts this last half-hour, and impatience is getting irrepressible. They cannot begin, Edmund, without you. Your partner is waiting."

"My partner?" reiterated Sir Edmund. "I have asked nobody yet."

"But I have, for you. At least, I have as good as done it. Lady Constance—"

"Oh, my dear aunt, you are very kind," he hastily interrupted; "but when I do dance—which is of rare occurrence—I like to choose my own partner. I must do so now."

"Well, take care, then," was the answer of Miss Hautley, not deeming it necessary to drop her voice in the least. "The room is anxious to see upon whom your choice will be fixed: it may be a type, they are saying, of what another choice of yours may be."

Sir Edmund laughed good-humouredly, making a joke of the allusion. "Then I must walk round deliberately and look out for myself—as it is said some of our royal reigning potentates have done. Thank you for the hint."

But, instead of walking round deliberately, Sir Edmund Hautley proceeded direct to one point of the room, halting before Lady Verner and Decima. He bent to the former, speaking a few words in a joking tone.

"I am bade to fix upon a partner, Lady Verner. May it be your daughter?"

Lady Verner looked at Decima. "She so seldom dances. I do not think you will persuade her."

"I think I can," he softly said, bending to Decima and holding out his arm. And Decima rose and put hers into it without a word.

"How capricious she is!" remarked Lady Verner to the Countess of Elmsley, who was sitting next her. "If I had pressed her, she would probably have said No. As she has done so many times."

He took his place at the head of the room, Decima by his side in her white silk robes. Decima, with her wondrous beauty, and the hectic on her cheeks again. Many an envious pair of eyes was cast to her. "That dreadful old maid, Decima Verner!" was amongst the compliments launched at her. "*She* to usurp him! How had my Lady Verner contrived to manœuvre for it?"

But Sir Edmund did not appear dissatisfied with his partner, if the room was. He paid a vast

deal more attention to her than he did to the dance: the latter he put out more than once, his head and eyes being bent, whispering to Decima. Before the dance was over, the hectic on her cheeks had grown deeper.

"Are you afraid of the night air?" he asked, leading her through the conservatory to the door at its other end.

"No. It never hurts me."

He proceeded along the gravel path round to the other side of the house: there he opened the glass doors of a room and entered it. It led into another, bright with fire.

"It is my own sitting-room," he observed.
"Nobody will intrude upon us here."

Taking up the poker, he stirred the fire into a blaze. Then he put it down and turned to her, as she stood on the hearth-rug.

"Decima!"

It was only a simple name; but Sir Edmund's whole frame was quivering with emotion as he spoke it. He clasped her to him with a strangely fond gesture, and bent his face on hers.

"I left my farewell on your lips when I quitted you, Decima. I must take my welcome from them now."

She burst into tears as she clung to him. "Sir Rufus sent for me when he was dying," she whispered. "Edmund, he said he was sorry to have opposed you; he said he would not if the time could come over again."

"I know it," he answered. "I have his full consent; nay, his blessing. They are but a few words, but they were the last he ever wrote. You shall see them, Decima; he calls you my future wife, Lady Hautley. Oh, my darling! what a long, a cruel separation it has been!"

Ay! far more long, more cruel for Decima than for him. She was feeling it bitterly now, as the tears poured down her face. Sir Edmund placed her in a chair. He hung over her scarcely less agitated than she was, soothing her with all the fondness of his true heart, with the sweet words she had once known so well. He turned to the door when she grew calmer.

"I am going to bring Lady Verner. It is time she knew it."

Not through the garden this time, but through the open passages of the house, lined with servants, went Sir Edmund. Lady Verner was in the seat where they left her. He made his way to her, and held his arm out that she might take it.

"Will you allow me to monopolise you for a few minutes?" he said. "I have a tale to tell in which you may feel interested."

"About India?" she asked, as she rose. "I suppose you used to meet some of my old friends there?"

"Not about India," he answered, leading her from the room. "India can wait. About some one nearer and dearer to us than any now in India. Lady Verner, when I asked you just now to permit

me to fix upon your daughter as a partner, I could have added for life. Will you give me Decima?"

Had Sir Edmund Hautley asked for herself, Lady Verner could scarcely have been more astonished. He poured into her ear the explanation, the whole tale of their old love, the inveterate opposition to it of Sir Rufus—which had driven him abroad. It had never been made known to Lady Verner.

"It was *that* caused you to exile yourself!" she reiterated in her amazement.

"It was, Lady Verner. Marry in opposition to my father, I would not—and had I been willing to brave him, Decima never would. So I left my home: I left Decima: my father perfectly understanding that our engagement existed still; that it only lay in abeyance until happier times. When he was dying, he repented of his harshness, and recalled his interdict; by letter to me, personally to Decima. He died with a blessing for us both on his lips. Jan can tell you so."

"What has Jan to do with it?" exclaimed Lady Verner.

"Sir Rufus made a confidant of Jan, and charged him with the message to me. It was Jan who enclosed to me the few words my father was able to trace."

"I think Jan might have imparted the secret to me," resentfully spoke Lady Verner. "It is just like ungrateful Jan."

"Jan ungrateful?—never!" spoke Sir Edmund, warmly. "There's not a truer heart breathing,

than Jan's. It was not his secret, and I expect he did not consider himself at liberty to tell even you. Decima would have imparted it to you years ago, when I went away, but for one thing."

"What may that have been?" asked Lady Verner.

"Because we feared, she and I, that your pride would be so wounded, and not unjustly, at my father's unreasonable opposition, that you might, in retaliation, forbid the alliance, then and always. You see I am candid, Lady Verner. I can afford to be so, can I not?"

"Decima ought to have told me," was all the reply given by Lady Verner.

"And Decima would have told you, at all hazards, but for my urgent entreaties. The blame is wholly mine, Lady Verner. You must forgive me."

"In what lay the objection of Sir Rufus?" she asked.

"I honestly believe that it arose entirely from that dogged self-will—may I be forgiven for speaking thus irreverently of my dead father!—which was his great characteristic through life. It was I who chose Decima, not he; and therefore my father opposed it. To Decima and to Decima's family he could not have any possible objection—in fact, he had not. But he liked to oppose his will to mine. I—if I know anything of myself—am the very reverse of self-willed, and I had always yielded to him. No question, until this, had ever arisen

that was of vital importance to my life and its happiness."

"Sir Rufus may have resented her want of fortune," remarked Lady Verner?

"I think not. He was not a covetous or a selfish man; and our revenues are such that I can make ample settlements on my wife. No, it was the self-will. But it is all over, and I can openly claim her. You will give her to me, Lady Verner?"

"I suppose I must," was the reply of my lady. "But people have been calling her an old maid."

Sir Edmund laughed. "How they will be disappointed! Some of their eyes may be opened to-night. I shall not deem it necessary to make a secret of our engagement now."

"You must permit me to ask one question, Sir Edmund. Have you and Decima corresponded?"

"No. We separated for the time entirely. The engagement existing in our own hearts alone."

"I am glad to hear it. I did *not* think Decima would have carried on a correspondence unknown to me."

"I am certain that she would not. And for that reason I never asked her to do it. Until I met Decima to-night, Lady Verner, we have had no communication with each other since I left. But I am quite sure that neither of us has doubted the other for a single moment."

"It has been a long while to wait," mused Lady Verner, as they entered the presence of Decima, who started up to receive them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WAS IT A SPECTRE ?

WHEN they returned to the rooms, Sir Edmund with Decima, Lady Verner by her daughter's side, the first object that met their view was Jan. Jan at a ball ! Lady Verner lifted her eyebrows : she had never believed that Jan would really show himself where he must be so entirely out of place. But there Jan was : in decent dress, too : black clothes, and a white neckcloth and gloves. It's true, the bow of his neckcloth was tied upside down, and the gloves had their thumbs nearly out. Jan's great hands laid hold of both Sir Edmund's.

" I'm uncommon glad you are back !" cried he —which was his polite phrase for expressing satisfaction.

" So am I, Jan," heartily answered Sir Edmund. " I have never had a real friend, Jan, since I left you."

" We can be friends still," said plain Jan.

" Ay," said Sir Edmund, meaningly, " and brothers." But the last word was spoken in Jan's ear alone, for they were in a crowd now.

" To see you here very much surprises me, Jan," remarked Lady Verner, asperity in her tone. " I hope you will contrive to behave properly."

Lady Mary Elmsley, then standing with them, laughed. "What are you afraid he should do, Lady Verner?"

"He was not made for society," said Lady Verner, with asperity.

"Nor society for me," returned Jan, good-humouredly. "I'd rather be watching a case of fever."

"Oh, Jan!" cried Lady Mary, laughing still.

"So I would," repeated Jan. "At somebody's bedside, in my easy coat, I feel at home. And I feel that I am doing good; that's more. *This* is nothing but waste of time."

"You hear?" appealed Lady Verner to them, as if Jan's avowal were a passing proof of her assertion—that he and society were antagonistic to each other. "I wonder you took the thought to attire yourself passably," she added, her face retaining its strong vexation. "Had anybody asked me, I should have given it as my opinion, that you had not things fit to appear in."

"I had got these," returned Jan, looking down at his clothes. "Won't they do? It's my funeral suit."

The unconscious, matter-of-fact style of Jan's avowal was beyond everything. Lady Verner was struck dumb, Sir Edmund smiled, and Mary Elmsley laughed outright.

"Oh, Jan!" said she, "you'll be a child all your days. What do you mean by your 'funeral suit'?"

"Anybody might know that," was Jan's answer

to Lady Mary. "It's the suit I keep for funerals. A doctor is always getting asked to attend them : and if he does not go, he offends the people."

"You might have kept the information to yourself," rebuked Lady Verner.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" asked Jan. "Aren't they good enough to come in?"

He turned his head round, to get a glance at the said suit behind. Sir Edmund laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder. Young as Jan had been before Edmund Hautley went out, they had lived close friends.

"The clothes are all right, Jan. And if you had come without a coat at all, you would have been equally welcome to me."

"I should not have gone to this sort of thing anywhere else, you know : it is not in my line, as my mother says. I came to see you."

"And I would rather see you, Jan, than anybody else in the room—with one exception," was the reply of Sir Edmund. "I am sorry not to see Lionel."

"He couldn't come," answered Jan. "His wife turned crusty, and said she'd come if he did—something of that—and so he stayed at home. She is very ill, and she wants to ignore it, and go out all the same. It is not fit she should."

"Pray do you mean to dance, Jan?" inquired Lady Verner, the question being put ironically.

"I?" returned Jan. "Who'd dance with me?"

"I'll dance with you, Jan," said Lady Mary.

Jan shook his head. "I might get my feet entangled in the petticoats."

"Not you, Jan," said Sir Edmund, laughing. "I should risk that, if a lady asked me."

"She'd not care to dance with me," returned Jan, looking at Mary Elmsley. "She only says it out of good-nature."

"No, Jan, I don't think I do," frankly avowed Lady Mary. "I should like to dance with you."

"I'd stand up with you, if I stood up with anybody," replied Jan. "But where's the good of it? I don't know the figures, and should only put you out, as well as everybody else."

So, what with his ignorance of the figures, and his dreaded awkwardness amidst the trains, Jan was allowed to rest in peace. Mary Elmsley told him that if he would come over sometimes to their house in an evening, she and her young sisters would practise the figures with him, so that he might learn them. It was Jan's turn to laugh now. The notion of his practising dancing, or having evenings to waste on it, amused him considerably.

"Go to your house to learn dancing!" echoed he. "Folks would be for putting me into a lunatic asylum. If I do find an hour to myself any odd evening, I have to get to my dissection. I went shares the other day in a beautiful subject——"

"I don't think you need tell me of that, Jan," interrupted Lady Mary, keeping her countenance.

"I wonder you talk to him, Mary," observed Lady Verner, feeling thoroughly ashamed of Jan,

and believing that everybody else did. "You hear how he repays you. He means it for good breeding, perhaps."

"I don't mean it for rudeness, at any rate," returned Jan. "Lady Mary knows that. Don't you?" he added, turning to her.

A strangely thrilling expression in her eyes as she looked at him was her only answer. "I would rather have that sort of rudeness from you, Jan," said she, "than the world's hollow politeness. There is so much of false—"

Mary Elmsley's sentence was never concluded. What was it that had broken in upon them? What object was that, gliding into the room like a ghost, on whom all eyes were strained with a terrible fascination? *Was* it a ghost? It appeared ghastly enough for one. Was it one of Jan's "subjects" come after him to the ball? Was it a corpse? It looked more like that than anything else. A corpse bedizened with jewels.

"She's mad!" exclaimed Jan, who was the first to recover his speech.

"What is it?" ejaculated Sir Edmund, gazing with something very like fear, as the spectre bore down towards him.

"It is my brother's wife," explained Jan. "You may see how fit she is to come."

There was no time for more. Sibylla had her hand held out to Sir Edmund, a wan smile on her ghastly face. His hesitation, his evident discomposure, as he took it, were not lost upon her.

"You have forgotten me, Sir Edmund: but I should have known you anywhere. Your face is bronzed, and it is the only change. Am *I* so much changed?"

"Yes, you are; greatly changed," was his involuntary acknowledgment in his surprise. "I should not have recognised you for the Sibylla West of those old days."

"I was at an age to change," she said. "I——"

The words were stopped by a fit of coughing. Not the ordinary cough, more or less violent, that we hear in every-day intercourse; but the dreadful cough that tells its tale of the hopeless state within. She had discarded her opera cloak, and stood there, her shoulders, back, neck, all bare and naked; très décolletée, as the French would say; shivering palpably: imparting the idea of a skeleton with rattling bones. Sir Edmund Hautley, quitting Decima, took her hand compassionately and led her to a seat.

Mrs. Verner did not like the attention. Pity, compassion was in every line of his face—in every gesture of his gentle hand: and she resented it.

"I am not ill," she declared to Sir Edmund, between the paroxysms of her distressing cough. "The wind seemed to take my throat as I got out of the fly, and it is making me cough a little, but I am not ill. Has Jan been telling you that I am?"

She turned round fiercely on Jan as she spoke. Jan had followed her to her chair, and stood near her; he may have deemed that so evident an invalid

should possess a doctor at hand. A good thing that Jan was of equable disposition, of easy temperament ; otherwise there might have been perpetual open war between him and Sibylla. She did not spare to him her sarcasms and her insults ; but never, in all Jan's intercourse with her, had he resented them.

"No one has told me anything about you in particular, Mrs. Verner," was the reply of Sir Edmund. "I see that you look delicate."

"I am not delicate," she sharply said. "It is nothing. I should be very well, if it were not for Jan."

"That's good," returned Jan. "What do I do ?"

"You worry me," she answered curtly. "You say I must not go out ; I must not do this, or do the other. You know you do. Presently you will be saying I must not dance. But I *will*."

"Does Lionel know you have come ?" inquired Jan, leaving other questions in abeyance.

"I don't know. It's nothing to him. He was not going to stop *me*. You should pay attention to your own appearance, Jan, instead of to mine ; look at your gloves !"

"They split as I was drawing them on," said Jan.

Sibylla turned from him with a gesture of contempt. "I am enchanted that you have come home, Sir Edmund," she said to the baronet.

"I am pleased myself, Mrs. Verner. Home has more charms for me than the world knows of."

"You will give us some nice entertainments, I

hope," she continued, her cough beginning to subside. "Sir Rufus lived like a hermit."

That she would not live to partake of any entertainments he might give, Sir Edmund Hautley felt as sure as though he had then seen her in her grave-clothes. No, not even could he be deceived, or entertain the faintest false hope, though the cough became stilled, and the brilliant hectic of reaction shone on her cheeks. Very beautiful would she then have looked, save for her attenuate frame, with that bright crimson flush and her gleaming golden hair.

Quite sufficiently beautiful to attract partners, and one came up and requested her to dance. She rose in acquiescence, turning her back right upon Jan, who would have interposed.

"Go away," said she. "I don't want any lecturing from you."

But Jan did not go away. He laid his hand impressively upon her shoulder. "You *must not* do it, Sibylla. There's a pond outside: it's just as good you went and threw yourself into that. It would do you no more harm."

She jerked her shoulder away from him; laughing a little scornful laugh, and saying a few contemptuous words to her partner, directed to Jan. Jan propped his back against the wall, and watched her, giving her a few words in his turn.

"As good try to turn a mule, as turn *her*."

He watched her through the quadrille. He watched the gradually increasing excitement of her

temperament. Nothing could be more pernicious for her; nothing more dangerous; as Jan knew. Presently he watched her plunge into a waltz: and just at that moment his eyes fell on Lionel.

He had just entered; he was shaking hands with Sir Edmund Hautley. Jan made his way to them.

"Have you seen Sibylla, Jan?" was the first question of Lionel to his brother. "I hear she has come."

For answer, Jan pointed towards a couple amidst the waltzers, and Lionel's dismayed gaze fell on his wife, whirling round at a mad speed, her eyes glistening, her cheeks burning, her bosom heaving. With the violence of the exertion, her poor breath seemed to rise in loud gasps, shaking her to pieces, and the sweat-drops poured off her brow.

One dismayed exclamation, and Lionel took a step forward. Jan caught him back.

"It is of no use, Lionel. I have tried. It would only make a scene, and be productive of no end. I am not sure, either, whether opposition at the present moment would not do as much harm as is being done."

"Jan!" cried Sir Edmund, in an undertone, "is—she—dying?"

"She is not far off it," was Jan's answer.

Lionel had yielded to Jan's remonstrance, and stood back against the wall, as Jan had previously been doing. The waltz came to an end. In the dispersion Lionel lost sight of his wife. A few moments, and strange sounds of noise and confusion

were echoing from an adjoining room. Jan went away at his own rate of speed, Lionel in his wake. They had caught the reiterated words, spoken in every phase of terrified tones, "Mrs. Verner! Mrs. Verner!"

Ah, poor Mrs. Verner! That had been her last dance on earth. The terrible exertion had induced a fit of coughing of unnatural violence, and in the straining a blood-vessel had once more broken.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAMP BURNT OUT AT LAST.

FROM the roof of the house to the floor of the cellar, ominous silence reigned in Deerham Court. Mrs. Verner lay in it—dying. She had been conveyed home from the Hall on the morning following the catastrophe. Miss Hautley and Sir Edmund urged her remaining longer, offering every possible hospitality; but poor Sibylla seemed to have taken a caprice against it. Caprices she would have, up to her last breath. All her words were “Home! home!” Jan said she might be moved with safety; and she was taken there.

She seemed none the worse for the removal—she was none the worse for it. She was dying, but the transit had not increased her danger or her pain. Dr. Hayes had been over in the course of the night, and was now expected again.

“It’s all waste of time, his coming; he can’t do anything; but it is satisfaction for Lionel,” observed Jan to his mother.

Lady Verner felt inclined to blame those of her household who had been left at home, for Sibylla’s escapade: all of them—Lionel, Lucy Tempest, and the servants. They ought to have prevented it, she said; have kept her in by force, had needs been.

But she blamed them wrongly. Lionel might have done so had he been present; there was no knowing whether he would so far have exerted his authority, but the scene that would inevitably have ensued might not have been less fatal in its consequences to Sibylla. Lucy answered, and with truth, that any remonstrance of hers to Sibylla would never have been listened to; and the servants excused themselves—it was not their place to presume to oppose Mr. Verner's wife.

She lay on the sofa in her dressing-room, propped up by pillows; her face wan, her breathing laboured. Decima with her, calm and still; Catherine hovered near, to be useful, if necessary; Lady Verner was in her room within call; Lucy Tempest sat on the stairs. Lucy, remembering certain curious explosions, feared that her presence might not be acceptable to the invalid; but Lucy partook of the general restlessness, and sat down in her simple fashion on the stairs, listening for news from the sick-chamber. Neither she nor any one else in the house could have divested themselves of the prevailing excitement that day, or settled to calmness in the remotest degree. Lucy wished from her very heart that she could do anything to alleviate the sufferings of Mrs. Verner, or to soothe the general discomfort.

By and by, Jan entered, and came straight up the stairs. "Am I to walk over you, Miss Lucy?"

"There's plenty of room to go by, Jan," she answered, pulling her dress aside.

"Are you doing penance?" he asked, as he strode past her.

"It is so dull, remaining in the drawing-room by myself," answered Lucy, apologetically. "Everybody is up-stairs."

Jan went in to the sick-room, and Lucy sat on, in silence; her head bent down on her knees, as before. Presently Jan returned.

"Is she any better, Jan?"

"She's no worse," was Jan's answer. "That's something, when it comes to this stage. Where's Lionel?"

"I do not know," replied Lucy. "I think he went out. Jan," she added, dropping her voice, "will she get well?"

"Get well!" echoed Jan in his plainness. "It's not likely. She won't be here four-and-twenty hours longer."

"Oh, Jan!" uttered Lucy, painfully startled and distressed. "What a dreadful thing! And all because of her going out last night!"

"Not altogether," answered Jan. "It has hastened it, no doubt; but the ending was not far off in any case."

"If I could but save her!" murmured Lucy, in her unselfish sympathy. "I shall always be thinking that perhaps if I had spoken to her last night, instead of going out to find Mr. Verner, she might not have gone."

"Look here," said Jan. "You are not an angel yet, are you, Miss Lucy?"

"Not at all like one, I fear, Jan," was her sad answer.

"Well, then, I can tell you for your satisfaction that an angel, coming down from heaven and endued with angel's powers, wouldn't have stopped her last night. She'd have gone in spite of it; in spite of you all. Her mind was made up to it; and her telling Lionel in the morning that she'd give up going, provided he would promise to take her for a day's pleasure to Heartburg, was only a ruse to throw the house off its guard."

Jan passed down. Lucy sat on. As Jan was crossing the courtyard,—for he actually went out at the front door for once in his life, as he had done the day he carried the blanket and the black tea-kettle,—he encountered John Massingbird. Mr. John wore his usual free-and-easy costume, and had his short pipe in his mouth.

"I say," began he, "what's this tale about Mrs. Lionel? Folks are saying that she went off to Hautley's last night, and danced herself to death."

"That's near enough," replied Jan. "She would go; and she did; and she danced; and she finished it up by breaking a blood-vessel. And now she is dying."

"What was Lionel about, to let her go?"

"Lionel knew nothing of it. She slipped off while he was out. Nobody was in the house but Lucy Tempest and one or two of the servants. She dressed herself on the quiet, sent for a fly, and went."

"And danced!"

"And danced," assented Jan. "Her back and shoulders looked like a bag of bones. You might nearly have heard them rattle."

"I always said there were moments when Sibylla's mind was not right," composedly observed John Massingbird. "Is there any hope?"

"None. There has not been hope, in point of fact, for a long while," continued Jan. "As any body might have seen, except Sibylla. She has been obstinately blind to it. Although her father warned her, when he was here, that she could not live."

John Massingbird smoked for some moments in silence. "She was always sickly," he presently said. "Sickly in constitution; sickly in temper."

Jan nodded. But what he might further have said was stopped by the entrance of Lionel. He came in at the gate, looking jaded and tired. His mind was ill at ease, and he had not been to bed.

"I have been searching for you, Jan. Dr. West ought to be telegraphed to. Can you tell where he is?"

"No, I can't," replied Jan. "He was at Biarritz when he last wrote; but they were about to leave it. I expect to hear from him daily. If we did know where he is, Lionel, telegraphing would be of no use. He could not get here."

"I should like him telegraphed to, if possible," was Lionel's answer.

"I'll telegraph to Biarritz, if you like," said Jan.
"He is sure to have left it, though."

"Do so," returned Lionel. "Will you come in?" he added, to John Massingbird.

"No, thank you," replied John Massingbird. "They'd not like my pipe. Tell Sibylla I hope she'll get over it. I'll come again by and by, and hear how she is."

Lionel went indoors and passed up-stairs with a heavy footstep. Lucy started from her place, but not before he had seen her in it.

"Why do you sit there, Lucy?"

"I don't know," she answered, blushing that *he* should have caught her there, though she had not cared for Jan's doing so. "It is lonely down stairs to-day: here I can ask everybody who comes out of the room how she is. I wish I could cure her! I wish I could do anything for her!"

He laid his hand lightly on her head as he passed. "Thank you for all, my dear child!" and there was a strange tone of pain in his low voice as he spoke it.

Only Decima was in the room then, and she quitted it as Lionel entered. Treading softly across the carpet, he took his seat in a chair opposite Sibylla's couch. She slept—for a great wonder—or appeared to sleep. The whole morning long—nay, the whole night long, her bright, restless eyes had been wide open: sleep as far from her as it could well be. It had seemed that her fractious temper kept the sleep away. But her eyes were

closed now, and two dark purple rims enclosed them, terribly dark on the wan white face. Suddenly the eyes unclosed with a start, as if her doze had been abruptly disturbed, though Lionel had been perfectly still. She looked at him for a minute or two in silence, and he, knowing it would be well that she should doze again, neither spoke nor moved.

“Lionel, am I dying?”

Quietly as the words were spoken, they struck on his ear with startling intensity. He rose then and pushed her hair from her damp brow with a fond hand, murmuring some general inquiry as to how she felt.

“Am I dying?” came again from the panting lips.

What was he to answer her? To say that she was dying, might send her into a paroxysm of terror; to deceive her in that awful hour by telling her she was not, went against every feeling of his heart.

“But I don’t want to die,” she urged, in some excitement, interpreting his silence to mean the worst. “Can’t Jan do anything for me? Can’t Dr. Hayes?”

“Dr. Hayes will be here soon,” observed Lionel, soothingly, if somewhat evasively. “He will come by the next train.”

She took his hand, held it between hers, and looked beseechingly up to his face. “I don’t want to leave you,” she whispered. “Oh Lionel! keep

me here if you can ! You know you are always kind to me. Sometimes I have reproached you that you were not, but it was not true. You have been ever kind, have you not ? ”

“ I have ever striven to be so,” he answered, the tears glistening on his eyelashes.

“ I don’t want to die. I want to get well and go about again, as I used to do when at Verner’s Pride. Now Sir Edmund Hautley is come home, that will be a good place to visit at. Lionel, I don’t want to die ! *Can’t* you keep me in life ? ”

“ If by sacrificing my own life, I could save yours, Heaven knows how willingly I would do it,” he tenderly answered.

“ Why should I die ? Why should I die, more than others ? I don’t think I am dying, Lionel,” she added, after a pause. “ I shall get well yet.”

She stretched out her hand for some cooling drink that was near, and Lionel gave her a tea-spoonful. He was giving her another, but she jerked her head away and spilled it.

“ It’s not nice,” she said. So he put it down.

“ I want to see Deborah,” she resumed.

“ My dear, they are at Heartburg. I told you so this morning. They will be home no doubt by the next train. Jan has sent to them.”

“ What should they do at Heartburg ? ” she fractiously asked.

“ They went over yesterday to remain until to-day, I hear.”

Subsiding into silence, she lay quite still, save for

her panting breath, holding Lionel's hand as he bent over her. Some noise in the corridor outside attracted her attention, and she signed to him to open the door.

"Perhaps it is Dr. Hayes," she murmured.
"He is better than Jan."

Better than Jan, insomuch as that he was rather given to assure his patients they would soon be strong enough to enjoy the al fresco delights of a gipsy party, even though he knew that they had not an hour's prolonged life left in them. Not so Jan. Never did a more cheering doctor enter a sick-room than Jan, so long as there was the faintest shade of hope. But, when the closing scene was actually come, the spirit all but upon the wing, then Jan whispered of hope no more. He could not do it in his pure sincerity. Jan could be silent; but Jan could not tell a man, whose soul was hovering on the threshold of the next world, that he might yet recreate himself dancing hornpipes in this. Dr. Hayes would; it was in his creed to do so; and in that respect Dr. Hayes was different from Jan.

It was not Dr. Hayes. As Lionel opened the door, Lucy was passing it, and Thérèse was at the end of the corridor talking to Lady Verner. Lucy stopped to make her kind inquiries, her tone a low one, of how the invalid was then.

"Whose voice is that?" called out Mrs. Verner, her words scarcely reaching her husband's ears.

"It is Lucy Tempest's," he said, closing the door, and returning to her. "She was asking after you."

"Tell her to come in."

Lionel opened the door again, and beckoned to Lucy. "Mrs. Verner is asking if you will come in and see her," he said as she approached.

All the old grievances, the insults of Sibylla, blotted out from her gentle and forgiving mind, lost sight of in this great crisis, Lucy went up to the couch, and stood by the side of Sibylla. Lionel leaned over its back.

"I trust you are not feeling very ill, Mrs. Verner," she said in a low, sweet tone, as she bent towards her and touched her hand. Touched it only; let her own fall lightly upon it; as if she did not feel sufficiently sure of Sibylla's humour to presume to take it.

"No, I don't think I'm better. I am so weak here."

She touched her chest as she spoke. Lucy, perhaps somewhat at a loss what to say, stood in silence.

"I have been very cross to you sometimes, Lucy," she resumed. "I meant nothing. I used to feel vexed with everybody, and said foolish things without meaning it. It was so cruel to be turned from Verner's Pride, and it made me unhappy."

"Indeed I do not think anything about it," replied Lucy, the tears rising to her eyes in her forgiving tenderness. "I know how ill you must have felt. I used to feel that I should like to help you to bear the pain and the sorrow."

Sibylla lay panting. Lucy remained as she was;

Lionel also. Presently she, Sibylla, glanced at Lucy.

"I wish you'd kiss me."

Lucy, unnerved by the words, bent closer to her, a shower of tears falling from her eyes on Sibylla's face.

"If I could but save her life for you!" she murmured to Lionel, glancing up at him through her tears as she rose from the embrace. And she saw that Lionel's eyes were as wet as hers.

And now there was a commotion outside. Sounds, as of talking and wailing and crying, were heard. Little need to tell Lionel that they came from the Miss Wests: he recognised the voices; and Lucy glided forward to open the door.

Poor ladies! They were wont to say ever after that their absence had happened on purpose. Mortified at being ignored in Miss Hautley's invitations, they had made a little plan to get out of Deerham. An old friend in Heartburg had repeatedly pressed them to dine there and remain for the night, and they determined to avail themselves of the invitation this very day of the *fête* at Deerham Hall. It would be pleasant to have to say to inquisitive friends, "We could not attend it; we were engaged to Heartburg." Many a lady, of more account in the world than Deborah and Amilly West, has resorted to a less innocent ruse to conceal a slight offered. Jan had despatched Master Cheese by the new railway that morning with the information of Sibylla's illness; and here

they were back again, full of grief, of consternation, and ready to show it in their demonstrative way.

Lionel hastened out to them, a Hush—sh ! upon his tongue. He caught hold of them as they were hastening in.

“ Yes ; but not like this. Be still, for her sake.”

Deborah looked at his pale face, reading it aright. “ Is she so ill as *that* ? ” she gasped. “ Is there no hope ? ”

He only shook his head. “ Whatever you do, preserve a calm demeanour before her. We must keep her in tranquillity.”

“ Master Cheese says she went to the ball—and danced,” said Deborah. “ Mr. Verner, how could you allow it ? ”

“ She did go,” he answered. “ It was no fault of mine.”

Heavier footsteps up the stairs now. They were those of the physician, who had come by the train which had brought the Miss Wests. He, Dr. Hayes, entered the room, and they stole in after him ; Lionel followed ; Jan came bursting in, and made another ; and Lucy remained outside.

Lady Verner saw Dr. Hayes when he was going away.

“ There was no change,” he said, in answer to her inquiries. “ Mrs. Verner was certainly in a very weak, sick state, and—there was no change.”

The Miss Wests removed their travelling garments, and took up their stations in the sick-room—not to leave it again until the life should have

departed from Sibylla. Lionel remained in it. Decima and Catherine went in and out, and Jan made frequent visits to the house.

"Tell papa it is the leaving Verner's Pride that has killed me," said Sibylla to Amilly with nearly her latest breath.

There was no bed for any of them that night, any more than there had been the previous one. A life was hovering in the balance. Lucy sat with Lady Verner, and the rest went in to them occasionally, taking news. Dawn was breaking when one went in for the last time.

It was Jan. He had come to break the tidings to his mother, and he sat himself down on the arm of the sofa—Jan fashion—while he did it.

The flickering lamp of life had burnt out at last.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ACHING HEARTS.

If there be one day in the whole year more gladdening to the heart than all others, it is surely the first day of early spring. It may come and give us a glimpse almost in mid-winter; it may not come until winter ought to have been long past: but, appear when it will, it brings rejoicing with it. How many a heart, sinking under its bitter burthen of care, is reawakened to hope by that first spring day of brightness! It seems to promise that there shall be yet a change in the dreary lot; it whispers that trouble may not last; that sickness may be superseded by health; that this dark wintry world will be followed by heaven.

Such a day was smiling over Deerham. And they were only in the first days of February. The sun was warm, the fields were green, the sky was blue: all Nature seemed to have put on her brightness. As Mrs. Duff stood at her door and exchanged greetings with sundry gossips passing by—an unusual number of whom were abroad—she gave it as her opinion that the charming weather had been vouchsafed as a special favour to Miss Decima Verner; for it was the wedding-day of that young lady and Sir Edmund Hautley.

Sir Edmund would fain have been married immediately after his return. Perhaps Decima would also. But Lady Verner, always given to study the proprieties of life, considered that it would be more seemly to allow a few months to roll on first after the death of her son's wife. So the autumn and part of the winter were allowed to go by; and in this, the first week of February, they were united; being favoured with weather that might have cheated them into a belief that it was May-day.

How anxious Deerham was to get a sight of her, as the carriages conveying the party to church drove to and fro! Lionel gave her away, and her bridesmaids were Lady Mary Elmsley and Lucy Tempest. The story of the long engagement between her and Edmund Hautley had electrified Deerham; and some began to wish that they had not called her an old maid quite so prematurely. Should it unfortunately have reached her ears, it might tend to place them in the black books of the future Lady Hautley. Lady Verner was rather against Jan's going to church. Lady Verner's private opinion was—indeed, it may be said her proclaimed opinion as well as her private one—that Jan would be no ornament to a wedding party. But Decima had already got Jan's promise to be present: which Jan had given conditionally—that no patients required him at the time. But Jan's patients proved themselves considerate that day; and Jan appeared not only at the church, but at the breakfast.

At the dinner also, in the evening. Sir Edmund

and Lady Hautley had left then; but those who remained of course wanted some dinner; and had it. It was a small party, more social than formal. Mr. and Mrs. Bitterworfh, Lord Garle and his sister, Miss Hautley, and John Massingbird. Miss Hautley was again staying temporarily at Deerham Hall, but she would leave it on the following day. John Massingbird was invited at the special request of Lionel. Perhaps John was less of an ornament to a social party than even Jan, but Lionel had been anxious that no slight should be placed upon him. It would have been a slight for the owner of Verner's Pride to be left out at Decima Verner's wedding. Lady Verner held out a little while; she did not like John Massingbird; never had liked any of the Massingbirds; but Lionel carried his point. John Massingbird showed himself presentable that day, and had left his pipe at home.

In one point Mr. Massingbird proved himself as little given to ceremony as Jan could be. The dinner hour, he had been told, was seven o'clock; and he arrived shortly after six. Lucy Tempest and Mary Elmsley were in the drawing-room. Fair, graceful girls both of them, in their floating white bridemaids' robes, which they would wear for the day: Lucy always serene and quiet; Mary, merry-hearted, gay-natured. Mary was to stay with them for some days. They looked somewhat scared at the early entrance of John Massingbird. Curious tales had gone about Deerham of John's wild habits at Verner's Pride, and, it may be, they felt half afraid

of him. Lucy whispered to the servant to find Mr. Verner and tell him. Lady Verner had gone to her room to make ready for dinner.

"I say, young ladies, is it six or seven o'clock that we are to dine?" he began. "I could not remember."

"Seven," replied Lucy.

"I am too soon by an hour, then," returned he, sitting down in front of the fire. "How are you by this time, Lionel?"

Lionel shook hands with him as he came in. "Never mind; we are glad to see you," he said in answer to a half apology from John Massingbird about the arriving early. "I can show you those calculations now, if you like."

"Calculations be hanged!" returned John. "When a fellow comes out to dinner, he does not want to be met with 'calculations.' What else, Lionel?"

Lionel Verner laughed. They were certain calculations drawn out by himself, connected with unavoidable work to be commenced on the Verner's Pride estate. For the last month he had been vainly seeking an opportunity of going over them with John Massingbird: that gentleman, who hated details as much as Master Cheese hated work, continually contrived to put it off.

"Have you given yourself the pleasure of making them out in duplicate, that you propose to show them here?" asked he, some irony in his tone. "I thought they were in the study at Verner's Pride."

"I brought them home a day or two ago," replied Lionel. "Some alteration was required, and I thought I would do it quietly here."

"You are a rare—I suppose if I say 'steward' I shall offend your pride, Lionel? 'Bailiff' would be worse. If real stewards were as faithful and indefatigable as you, landlords might get on better than they do. You can't think how he plagues me with his business details, Miss Tempest."

"I can," said Lady Mary, freely. "I think he is terribly conscientious."

"All the more so, that he is not going to be a steward long," answered Lionel, in a tone through which ran a serious meaning, light as it was. "The time is approaching when I shall render up an account of my stewardship, so far as Verner's Pride is concerned."

"What do you mean by that?" cried John Massingbird.

"I'll tell you to-morrow," answered Lionel.

"I'd like to know now, if it's all the same to you, sir," was John's answer. "You are not going to give up the management of Verner's Pride."

"Yes, I am," replied Lionel. "I should have resigned it when my wife died, but that—that—Decima wished me to remain in Deerham until her marriage," he concluded, after some perceptible hesitation.

"What has Deerham done to you, that you want to quit it?" asked John Massingbird.

"I would have left Deerham years ago, had it been practicable," was the remark of Lionel.

"I ask you why?"

"Why? Do you think Deerham and its reminiscences can be so pleasant to me, that I should care to stop in it, unless compelled?"

"Bother reminiscences!" rejoined Mr. Massingbird. "I conclude you make believe to allude to the ups and downs you have had in regard to Verner's Pride. *That's* not the cause, Lionel Verner—if you do want to go away. You have had time to get over that. Perhaps some lady is in the way? Some cross-grained disappointment in that line? Have you been refusing to marry him, Lady Mary?"

Lady Mary threw her laughing blue eyes full in the face of the questioner. "He never asked me, Mr. Massingbird."

"No!" said John.

"No," said she, the lips laughing now, as well as the eyes. "In the old days—I declare I don't mind letting out the secret—in the old days, before he was married at all, mamma and Lady Verner contrived to let me know by indirect hints, that Lionel Verner might be expected to—to—solicit the honour of my becoming his wife. How I laughed behind their backs! It would have been time enough to turn rebellious when the offer came—which I was quite sure never would come—to make them and him a low curtsey, and say, 'You are very kind, but I must decline the honour.' Did you get any teasings on your side, Lionel?" asked she frankly.

A half-smile flitted over Lionel's lips. He did not speak.

"No," added Lady Mary, her joking tone turning to seriousness, her blue eyes to earnestness, "I and Lionel have ever been good friends, fond of each other, I believe, in a sober kind of way: but—any closer relationship, we should both have run apart from, as wide as the two poles. I can answer for myself: and I think I can for him."

"I see," said John Massingbird. "To be husband and wife would go against the grain: you'd rather be brother and sister."

What there could be in the remark to disturb the perfect equanimity of Mary Elmsley, she best knew. Certain it was, that her face turned of a fiery red, and it seemed that she did not know where to look. She spoke rapid words, as if to cover her confusion.

"So you perceive, Mr. Massingbird, that *I* have nothing to do with Mr. Verner's plans and projects; with his stopping at Deerham or going away from it. I should not think any lady has. You are not going, are you?" she asked, turning to Lionel.

"Yes, I shall go, Mary," he answered. "As soon as Mr. Massingbird can find somebody to replace me——"

"Mr. Massingbird's not going to find anybody to replace you," burst forth John. "I declare, Lionel, if you do go, I'll take on Roy, just to spite you and your old tenants. By-the-way, though, talking of Roy, who do you think has come back

to Deerham?" he broke off rather less vehemently.

"How can I guess?" asked Lionel. "Some of the Mormons, perhaps."

"No. Luke Roy. He has arrived this afternoon."

"Has he indeed?" replied Lionel, a shade of sadness in his tone, more than surprise, for somehow the name of Luke, coupled with his return, brought back all too vividly the recollection of his departure, and the tragic end of Rachel Frost which had followed so close upon it.

"I have not seen him," rejoined Mr. Massingbird. "I met Mrs. Roy as I came on here, and she told me. She was scuttering along with some muffins in her hand—to regale him on, I suppose."

"How glad she must be!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Rather sorry, I thought," returned John. "She looked very quaky and shivery. I tell you what, Lionel," he continued, turning to him, "your dinner will not be ready this three-quarters of an hour yet. I'll just go as far as old Roy's, and have a word with Luke. I have got a top-coat in the hall."

He went out without ceremony. Lionel walked with him to the door. It was a fine starlight evening. When he, Lionel, returned, Lucy was alone. Mary Elmsley had left the room.

Lucy had quitted the chair of state she had been sitting in, and was in her favourite place on a low

stool on the hearthrug. She was more kneeling than sitting. The fire-light played on her sweet face, so young and girlish still in its outlines, on her pretty hands clasped on her knees, on her arms which glittered with pearls, on the pearls that rested on her neck. Lionel stood on the other side of the hearthrug, leaning as usual on the mantelpiece.

At least five minutes passed in silence. And then Lucy raised her eyes to his.

"Was it a joke, what you said to John Massingbird—about leaving Deerham?"

"It was sober earnest, Lucy. I shall go as soon as I possibly can, now."

"But why?" she presently asked.

"I should have left, as you heard me say, after Mrs. Verner's death, but for one or two considerations. Decima very much wished me to remain until her marriage; and—I did not see my way particularly clear to embark in a new course of life. I do not see it yet."

"Why should you go?" asked Lucy.

"Because I—because it is expedient that I should, for many reasons," he answered.

"You do not like to remain subservient to John Massingbird?"

"It is not that. I have got over that. My prospects have been so utterly blighted, Lucy, that I think some of the old pride of the Verner race has gone out of me. I do not see a chance of getting anything to do, half as good as this stewardship—as

he but now called it—under John Massingbird. But I shall try at it."

"What shall you try, do you think?"

"I cannot tell. I should like to get something abroad; I should like to go to India. I do not suppose I have any real chance of getting an appointment there; but stopping in Deerham will certainly not bring it to me. That, or anything else."

Lucy's lips had parted. "You will not think of going to India now!" she breathlessly exclaimed.

"Indeed I do think of it, Lucy."

"So far off as that!"

The words were uttered with a strange sound of pain. Lionel passed his hand over his brow, the action betokening pain quite as great as Lucy's tone. Lucy rose from her seat and stood near him, her thoughtful face upturned.

"What is left for me in England?" he resumed. "What am I here? A man without home, fortune, hope. I have worse than no prospects. The ceremony at which we have been assisting this day seems to have brought the bare facts more palpably before me in all their naked truth. Other men can have a home, can form social ties to bless it. I cannot."

"But why?" asked Lucy; her lips trembling.

"*Why!* Can you ask it, Lucy? There are moments—and they are all too frequent—when a fond vision comes over me of what my future might be; of the new ties I might form, and find the happiness in, that—that I did not find in the last.

The vision, I say, comes all too frequently for my peace of mind, when I realise the fact that it can never be realized."

Lucy stood, her hands tightly clasped before her, a world of sadness in her fair young face. One less entirely single-hearted, less *true* than Lucy Tempest, might have professed to ignore the drift of his words. Had Lucy, since Mrs. Verner's death, cast a thought to the possibility of certain happy relations arising between her and Lionel—those social ties he now spoke of? No, not intentionally. If any such dreams did lurk in her heart unbidden, there she had let them lie, in entire abeyance. Lionel Verner had never spoken a word to her, or dropped a hint that he contemplated such: his intercourse with her had been free and open, just as it was with Decima. She was quite content: to be with him, to see him daily, was enough of happiness for her, without looking to the future.

"The farther I get away from England the better," he resumed. "India, from old associations, naturally suggests itself, but I care not whither I go. You threw out a suggestion once, Lucy, that Colonel Tempest might be able to help me to something there, by which I may get a living. Should I have found no success in London by the time he arrives, it is my intention to ask him the favour. He will be home in a few weeks now."

"And you talk of leaving Deerham immediately!" cried Lucy. "Where's the necessity? You should wait until he comes."

"I have waited too long, as it is. Deerham will be glad to get rid of me. It may hold a jubilee the day it hears I have shipped myself off for India. I wonder if I shall ever come back? Probably not. I and old friends may never meet again on this side heaven."

He had been affecting to speak lightly, jokingly, toying at the same time with some trifle on the mantel-piece. But as he turned his eyes on Lucy at the conclusion of his sentence, he saw that the tears were falling on her cheeks. The words, the ideas they conjured up, had jarred painfully on every fibre of her heart. Lionel's light mood was gone.

"Lucy," he whispered, bending to her, his tone changing to one of passionate earnestness, "I dare not stay here longer. There are moments when I am tempted to forget my position, to forget honour, and speak words that—that—I ought not to speak. Even now, as I look down upon you, my heart is throbbing, my veins are tingling; but I must not touch you with my finger, or tell you of my impassioned love. All I can do is to carry it away with me, and battle with it alone."

Her face had grown white with emotion. She raised her wet eyes yearningly to his: but she still spoke the simple truth, unvarnished, the great agony that was lying at her heart.

"How shall I live on, with you away? It will be more lonely than I can bear."

"Don't, child!" he said, in a wailing tone of

entreaty. "The temptation from my own heart is all too present to me. Don't *you* tempt me. Strong man though I am, there are things that I cannot bear."

He leaned on the mantel-piece, shading his face with his hand. Lucy stood in silence, striving to suppress her emotion from breaking forth.

"In the old days—very long ago, they seem now, to look back upon—I had the opportunity of assuring my life's happiness," he continued, in a low, steady tone. "I did not do it; I let it slip from me, foolishly, wilfully; of my own free act. But, Lucy—believe me or not as you like—I loved the one I rejected, more than the one I took. Before the sound of my marriage bells had yet rung out on my ears, the terrible conviction was within me that I loved that other better than all created things. You may judge, then, what my punishment has been."

She raised her eyes to his face, but he did not see them, did not look at her. He continued:—

"It was the one great mistake of my life: made by myself alone. I cannot plead the excuse which so many are able to plead for life's mistakes—that I was drawn into it. I made it deliberately, as may be said; of my own will. It is but just, therefore, that I should expiate it. How I have suffered in the expiation, Heaven alone knows. It is true that I bound myself in a moment of delirium, of passion; giving myself no time for thought: but I have never looked upon that fact as an excuse; for a man who has come to the years I had, should hold his feelings

under his own control. Yes : I missed that opportunity, and the chance went by for life."

"For life ?" repeated Lucy, with streaming eyes. It was too terribly real a moment for any attempt at concealment. A little reticence, in her maiden modesty ; but of concealment, none.

"I am a poor man now, Lucy," he explained : "worse than without prospects, if you knew all. And I do not know why you should not know all," he added, after a pause : "I am in debt. Such a man cannot marry."

The words were spoken quietly, temperately ; their tone proving how hopeless could be any appeal against them, whether from him, from her, or from without. It was perfectly true : Lionel Verner's position placed him beyond the reach of social ties.

Little more was said. It was a topic which Lucy could not urge or gainsay ; and Lionel did not see fit to continue it : he may have felt that it was dangerous ground, even for the man of honour that he strove to be. He held out his hand to Lucy.

"Will you forgive me ?" he softly whispered.

Her sobs choked her. She strove to speak, as she crept closer to him, and put out her hands in answer ; but the words would not come. She lifted her face to glance at his.

"Not a night passes but I pray God to forgive me," he whispered, his voice trembling with emotion, as he pressed her hands between his, "to forgive the sorrow I have brought upon you. Oh, Lucy ! forgive—forgive me !"

"Yes, yes," was all her answer, her sobs impeding her utterance, her tears blinding her. Lionel kept the hands strained to him; he looked down on the upturned face, and read its love there; he kept his own bent, with its mingled expression of tenderness and pain: but he did not take from it a single caress. What right had he? Verily, if he had not shown control over himself once in his life, he was showing it now.

He released one of his hands and laid it gently upon her head for a minute, his lips moving silently. Then he let her go. It was over.

She sat down on the low stool again on the opposite side the hearth, and buried her face and her anguish. Lionel buried *his* face, his elbow on the mantel-piece, his hand uplifted: he never looked at her again, or spoke; she never raised her head; and when the company began to arrive, and came in, the silence was still unbroken.

And, as they talked and laughed that night, fulfilling the usages of society amidst the guests, how little did any one present suspect the scene which had taken place but a short while before! How many of the smiling faces we meet in society cover aching hearts!

CHAPTER XXVII.

MASTER CHEESE BLOWN UP.

THERE were other houses in Deerham, that night, not quite so full of sociability as was Lady Verner's. For one, may be instanced that of the Miss Wests. They sat at the table in the general sitting-room, hard at work, a lamp between them, for the gas-burners above were high for sewing, and their eyes were no longer so keen as they had been. Miss Deborah was "turning" a table-cloth; Miss Amilly was darning sundry holes in a pillow-case. Their stock of household linen was in great need of being replaced by new; but, not having the requisite money to spare, they were doing their best to renovate the old.

A slight—they could not help feeling it as such—had been put upon them that day, in not having been invited to Decima Verner's wedding. The sisters-in-law of Lionel Verner, connected closely with Jan, they had expected the invitation. But it had not come. Lionel had pressed his mother to give it; Jan, in his straightforward way, when he had found it was not forthcoming, said, "Why don't you invite them? They'd do nobody any harm." Lady Verner, however, had positively declined: the Wests had

never been acquaintances of hers, she said. They felt the slight, poor ladies. But they felt it quite humbly and meekly; not complaining; not venturing even to say to each other that they *might* have been asked. They only sat a little more silent than usual over their work that evening, doing more, and talking less.

The servant came in with the supper-tray, and laid it on the table. "Is the cold pork to come in?" asked she. "I have not brought it. I thought, perhaps, you'd not care to have it in to-night, ma'am, as Mr. Jan's out."

Miss Deborah cast her eyes on the tray. There was a handsome piece of cheese, and a large glass of fresh celery. A rapid calculation passed through her mind that the cold pork, if not cut for supper, would make a dinner the following day, with an apple or a jam pudding.

"No, Martha, this will do for to-night," she answered. "Call Master Cheese, and then draw the ale."

"It's a wonder *he* waits to be called," was Martha's comment, as she went out. "He is generally in afore the tray, whatever the meals may be, he is."

She went out at the side door, and entered the surgery. Nobody was in it except the surgery-boy. The boy was asleep, with his head and arms on the counter, and the gas flared away over him. A hissing and fizzing from Jan's room, similar to the sounds Lucy Tempest heard when she invaded the

surgery the night of the ball at Deerham Hall, saluted Martha's ears. She went round the counter, tried the door, found it fastened, and shook the handle.

"Who's there?" called out Master Cheese from the other side.

"It's me," said Martha. "Supper's ready."

"Very well. I'll be in directly," responded Master Cheese.

"I say!" called out Martha, wrathfully, rattling the handle again, "if you are making a mess of that room, as you do sometimes, I won't have it. I'll complain to Mr. Jan. There! Messing the floor and places with your powder and stuff! It would take two servants to clear up after you."

"You go to Bath," was the satisfactory recommendation of Master Cheese.

Martha called out another wrathful warning, and withdrew. Master Cheese came forth, locked the door, took out the key, went in-doors, and sat down to supper.

Sat down in angry consternation. He threw his eager glances to every point of the table, and could not see upon it what he was longing to see—what he had been expecting all the evening to see—for the terrible event of its not being there had never so much as crossed his imagination. The dinner had consisted of a loin of pork with the crackling on, and apple-sauce. A dish so beloved by Master Cheese, that he never thought of it without a watering of the mouth. It had been nothing like half eaten at

dinner, neither the pork nor the sauce. Jan was at the wedding-breakfast, and the Miss Wests, in Master Cheese's estimation, ate like two sparrows: of course he had looked to be regaled with it at supper. Miss West cut him a large piece of cheese, and Miss Amilly handed him the glass of celery.

Now Master Cheese had no great liking for that vulgar edible which bore his name, and which used to form the staple of so many good old-fashioned suppers. To cheese, in the abstract, he could certainly have borne no forcible objection, since he was wont to steal into the larder, between breakfast and dinner, and help himself—as Martha would grumbly complain—to “pounds” of it. The state of the case was just this: the young gentleman liked cheese well enough when he could get nothing better. Cheese, however, as a substitute for cold loin of pork, with “crackling” and apple-sauce, was hardly to be borne, and Master Cheese sat in dumbfounded dismay, heaving great sighs and casting his eyes upon his plate.

“I feel quite faint,” said he.

“What makes you feel faint?” asked Miss Deb.

“Well, I suppose it is for want of my supper,” he returned. “Is—is there no meat to-night, Miss Deb?”

“Not any,” she answered decisively. She had the pleasure of knowing Master Cheese well.

Master Cheese paused. “There was nearly the whole joint left at dinner,” said he, in a tone of remonstrance.

"There was a good deal of it left, and that's the reason it's not coming in," replied Miss Deb. "It will be sufficient for to-morrow's dinner with a pudding. I'm sure it will not hurt you to sup upon cheese for one night."

With all his propensity for *bonne chère*, Master Cheese was really of a modest nature, and would not go the length of demanding luxuries, if denied them by Miss Deb. He was fain to content himself with the cheese and celery, eating so much of it that it may be a question whether the withholding of the cold pork had been a gain in point of economy.

Laying down his knife at length, he put back his chair to return to the surgery. Generally he was not in so much haste; he liked to wait until the things were removed, even to the cloth, lest by a speedy departure he might miss some nice little dainty or other, coming in at the tail of the repast. It is true such impromptu arrivals were not common at Miss West's table, but Master Cheese liked to be on the sure side.

"You are in a hurry," remarked Miss Amilly, surprised at the unwonted withdrawal.

"Jan's out," returned Master Cheese. "Folks may be coming in to the surgery."

"I wonder if Mr. Jan will be late to-night?" cried Miss Deb.

"Of course he will," confidently replied Master Cheese. "Who ever heard of a wedding-party breaking up before morning?"

For this reason, probably, Master Cheese returned to the surgery, prepared to "make a night of it." Not altogether in the general acceptation of that term, but at his chemical experiments. It was most rare that he could make sure of Jan's absence for any length of time. When abroad in pursuance of his professional duties, Jan might be returning at any period; in five minutes or in five hours. There was no knowing: and Master Cheese dared not get his chemical apparatus about, in the uncertainty, Jan having so positively forbidden his recreations in the science. For this night, however, he thought he was safe. Master Cheese's ideas of a wedding festival consisted of unlimited feasting. *He* could not have left such a board, if bidden to one, until morning light, and he judged others by himself.

Jan's bedroom was strewed with vessels of various sorts and sizes from one end of it to the other. In the old days, Dr. West had been a considerable dabbler in experimental chemistry himself. Jan also understood something of it. Master Cheese did not see why he should not. A roaring fire burnt in Jan's grate, and the young gentleman stood before it for a few minutes, previous to resuming his researches, giving his back a roast, and indulging bitter reminiscences touching his deficient supper.

"She's getting downright mean, is that old Deb!" grumbled he. "Especially if Jan happens to be out. Wasn't it different in West's time! He knew what was good, he did. Catch her daring to put bread and cheese on the table for supper then. I

shall be quite exhausted before the night's over. Bob!"

Bob, his head still on the counter, partially woke up at the call. Sufficiently so to return a half sound by way of response.

"Bob!" roared Master Cheese again. "Can't you hear?"

Bob, his eyes blinking and winking, came in, in answer. That is, as far as he could get in, for the litter lying about.

"Bring in the jar of tamarinds."

"The jar of tamarinds!" repeated Bob. "In here?"

"Yes, in here," said Master Cheese. "Now, you needn't stare. All you have got to do is to obey orders."

Bob disappeared, and presently returned, lugging in a big porcelain jar. He was ordered to "take out the bung, and leave it open." He did so, setting it in a convenient place on the floor, near Master Cheese, and giving his opinion gratuitously of the condition of the room. "Won't there be a row when Mr. Jan comes in and finds it like this!"

"The things will be put away long before he comes," responded Master Cheese. "Mind your own business. And, look here! if anybody comes bothering, Mr. Jan's out, and Mr. Cheese is out, and they can't be seen till the morning. Unless it's some desperate case," added Master Cheese, somewhat qualifying the instructions. "A fellow dying, or anything of that."

Bob withdrew, to fall asleep in the surgery as before, his head and arms on the counter; and Master Cheese recommenced his studies. Solacing himself first of all with a few mouthfuls of tamarinds, as he intended to do at intervals throughout his labours, he plunged his hands into a mass of incongruous substances—nitre, chlorate of potass, and sulphur being amongst them.

The Miss Wests, meanwhile, had resumed their work after supper, and they sewed until the clock struck ten. Then they put it away, and drew round the fire for a chat, their feet on the fender. A very short while, and they were surprised by the entrance of Jan.

“My goodness!” exclaimed Miss Amilly. “It’s never you yet, Mr. Jan!”

“Why shouldn’t it be?” returned Jan, drawing forward a chair, and sitting down by them. “Did you fancy I was going to sleep there?”

“Master Cheese thought you would keep it up until morning.”

“Oh! did he? Is he gone to bed?”

“He is in the surgery,” replied Miss Amilly. “Mr. Jan, you have told us nothing yet about the wedding in the morning.”

“It went off,” answered Jan.

“But the details? How did the ladies look?”

“They looked as usual, for all I saw,” replied Jan.

“What did they wear?”

“Wear? Gowns, I suppose.”

"Oh, Mr. Jan ! Surely you saw better than that ! Can't you tell what sort of gowns ? "

Jan really could not. It may be questioned whether he could have told a petticoat from a gown. Miss Amilly was waiting with breathless interest, her lips apart.

"Some were in white, and some were in colours, I think," hazarded Jan, trying to be correct in his good nature. "Decima was in a veil."

"*Of course* she was," acquiesced Miss Amilly with emphasis. "Did the bridemaids——"

What pertinent question relating to the bridemaids Miss Amilly was about to put, never was known. A fearful sound interrupted it. A sound nearly impossible to describe. Was it a crash of thunder ? Had an engine from the distant railway taken up its station outside their house, and gone off with a bang ? Or had the surgery blown up ? The room they were in shook, the windows rattled, the Miss Wests screamed with real terror, and Jan started from his seat.

"It can't be an explosion of gas !" he muttered.

Bursting out of the room, he nearly knocked down Martha, who was bursting into it. Instinct, or perhaps sound, took Jan to the surgery, and they all followed in his wake. Bob, the image of terrified consternation, stood in the midst of a *débris* of glass, his mouth open, and his hair standing upright. The glass bottles and jars of the establishment had flown from their shelves, causing the unhappy Bob to believe that the world had come to an end.

But what was the *débris* there, compared to the *débris* in the next room, Jan's! The window was out, the furniture was split, the various chemical apparatus had been shivered into a hundred pieces, the tamarind jar was in two, and Master Cheese was extended on the floor on his back, his hands scorched, his eyebrows singed off, his face black, and the end of his nose burning.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" said Jan, when his eyes took in the state of things. "I knew it would come to it."

"He have been and blowed hisself up," remarked Bob, who had stolen in after them.

"Is it the gas?" sobbed Miss Amilly, hardly able to speak for terror.

"No, it's not the gas," returned Jan, examining the *débris* more closely. "It's one of that gentleman's chemical experiments."

Deborah West was bending over the prostrate form in alarm. "He surely can't be dead!" she shivered.

"Not he," said Jan. "Come, get up," he added, taking Master Cheese by the arm to assist him.

He was placed in a chair, and there he sat, coming-to, and emitting sundry dismal groans.

"I told you what you'd bring it to, if you persisted in attempting experiments that you know nothing about," was Jan's reprimand, delivered in a sharp tone. "A pretty state of things this is!"

Master Cheese groaned again.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Miss Deb, in a sympathising accent.

"Oh-o-o-o-o-o-h!" moaned Master Cheese.

"Is there anything we can get for you?" resumed Miss Deb.

"Oh-o-o-o-o-o-h!" repeated Master Cheese. "A glass of wine might revive me."

"Get up," said Jan, "and let's see if you can walk. He's not hurt, Miss Deb."

Master Cheese, yielding to the peremptory movement of Jan's arm, had no resource but to show them that he could walk. He had taken a step or two as dolefully as it was possible for him to take it, keeping his eyes shut, and stretching out his hands before him, after the manner of the blind, when an interruption came from Miss Amilly.

"What can this be, lying here?"

She was bending her head near the old bureau, which had been rent in the explosion, her eyes fixed upon some large letter or paper on the floor. They crowded round at the words. Jan picked it up, and found it to be a folded parchment bearing a great seal.

"Halloo!" exclaimed Jan.

On the outside was written "Codicil to the will of Stephen Verner."

"What is it?" exclaimed Miss Deborah, and even Master Cheese contrived to get his eyes open to look.

"It is the lost codicil," replied Jan. "It must have been in that bureau. How did it get there?"

How indeed? There ensued a pause.

"It must have been placed there"—Jan was beginning, and then he stopped himself. He would not, before those ladies, say—"by Dr. West."

But to Jan it was now perfectly clear. That old hunting for the "prescription," which had puzzled him at the time, was explained now. *There* was the "prescription"—the codicil! Dr. West had had it in his hand when disturbed in that room by a stranger: he had flung it back in the bureau in his hurry; pushed it back: and by some unexplainable means, he must have pushed it too far out of sight. And there it had lain until now, intact and undiscovered.

The hearts of the Miss Wests were turning to sickness, their countenances to pallor. That it could be no other than their father who had stolen the codicil from Stephen Verner's dying chamber, was present to their conviction. His motive could only have been to prevent Verner's Pride passing to Lionel, over his daughter and her husband. What did he think of his work when the news came of Frederick's death? What did he think of it when John Massingbird returned in person? What did he think of it when he read Sibylla's dying message, written to him by Amilly—"Tell papa it is the leaving Verner's Pride that has killed me"?

"I shall take possession of this," said Jan Verner.

Master Cheese was conveyed to the house and

consigned to bed, where his burnings were dressed by Jan, and restoratives administered to him, including the glass of wine.

The first thing on the following morning the codicil was handed over to Mr. Matiss. He immediately recognised it by its appearance. But it would be opened officially later, in the presence of John Massingbird. Jan betook himself to Verner's Pride to carry the news, and found Mr. Massingbird astride on a pillar of the terrace steps, smoking away with gusto. The day was warm and sunshiny as the previous one had been.

"What, is it you?" cried he, when Jan came in sight. "You are up here betimes. Anybody dying, this way?"

"Not this morning," replied Jan. "I say, Massingbird, there's ill news in the wind for you."

"What's that?" composedly asked John, tilting some ashes out of his pipe.

"That codicil has come to light."

John puffed on vigorously, staring at Jan, but never speaking.

"The thief must have been old West," went on Jan. "Only think! it has been hidden all this while in that bureau of his, in my bed-room."

"What has unhidden it?" demanded Mr. Massingbird, in a half-satirical tone, as if he doubted the truth of the information.

"An explosion did that. Cheese got meddling with dangerous substances, and there was a blow-up. The bureau was thrown down and broken, and the

codicil was dislodged. To talk of it, it sounds like an old stage trick."

"Did Cheese blow himself up?" asked John Massingbird.

"Yes. But he came down again. He is in bed with burnt hands and a scorched face. If I had told him once to let that dangerous play alone—dangerous in his hands—I had told him ten times."

"Where's the codicil?" inquired Mr. Massingbird, smoking away.

"In Matiss's charge. You'd like to be present, I suppose, at the time of its being opened?"

"I can take your word," returned John Massingbird. "This does not surprise me. I have always had an impression that the codicil would turn up."

"It is more than I have had," dissented Jan.

As if by common consent, they spoke no further on the subject of the abstraction and its guilty instrument. It was a pleasant theme to neither. John Massingbird, little refinement of feeling that he possessed, could not forget that Dr. West was his mother's brother: or Jan, that he was his late master, his present partner—that he was connected with him in the eyes of Deerham. Before they had spoken much longer, they were joined by Lionel.

"I shall give you no trouble, old fellow," was John Massingbird's salutation. "You gave me none."

"Thank you," answered Lionel. Though what

precise trouble it lay in John Massingbird's power to give him, he did not see, considering that things were now so plain.

"You'll accord me house-room for a bit longer, though, won't you?"

"I will accord it you as long as you like," replied Lionel, in the warmth of his heart.

"You know I would have had you stop on here all along," remarked Mr. Massingbird; "but the bar to it was Sibylla. I am not sorry the thing's found. I am growing tired of my life here. It has come into my mind at times lately to think whether I should not give up to you, Lionel, and be off over the seas again. It's tame work, this, to one who has roughed it at the Diggings."

"You'd not have done it," observed Jan, alluding to the giving up.

"Perhaps not," said John Massingbird; "but I have owed a debt to Lionel for a long while. I say, old chap, didn't you think I clapped on a good sum for your trouble when I offered you the management of Verner's Pride?"

"I did," answered Lionel.

"Ay! I was in your debt; am in it still. Careless as I am, I thought of it now and then."

"I do not understand you," said Lionel. "In what way are you in my debt?"

"Let it go for now," returned John. "I may tell you some time, perhaps. When shall you take up your abode here?"

Lionel smiled. "I will not invade you without

warning. You and I will take counsel together, John, and discuss plans and expediencies."

"I suppose you'll be for setting about your improvements now?"

"Yes," answered Lionel, his tone changing to one of deep seriousness, not to say reverence. "Without loss of time."

"I told you they could wait until you came into the estate. It has not been long first, you see."

"No; but I never looked for it," said Lionel.

"Ah! Things turn up that we don't look for," concluded John Massingbird, smoking on as serenely as though he had come into an estate, instead of having lost one. "There'll be bonfires all over the place to-night, Lionel. A left-handed compliment to me. Here comes Luke Roy. I told him to be here this morning. What nuts this will be for old Roy to crack! He has been fit to stick me, ever since I refused him the management of Verner's Pride."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIGHT THROWN ON OBSCURITY.

AND so, the trouble and the uncertainty, the ups and the downs, the turnings out and changes were at an end, and Lionel Verner was at rest. At rest so far as rest can be, in this lower world. He was reinstalled at Verner's Pride, its undisputed master; never again to be sent forth from it during life.

He had not done as John Massingbird did—gone right in, the first day, and taken up his place, sans cérémonie, without word and without apology, at the table's head, leaving John to take his at the side or the foot, or where he could. Quite the contrary. Lionel's refinement of mind, his almost sensitive consideration for the feelings of others, clung to him now, as it always had done, as it always would do, and he was chary of disturbing John Massingbird too early in his sway of the internal economy of Verner's Pride. It had to be done, however; and John Massingbird remained on with him, his guest.

All that had passed: and the spring of the year was growing late. The codicil had been proved; the neighbourhood had tendered their congratulations to the new master, come into his own at last; the improvements, in which Lionel's conscience held

so deep a score, were begun and in good progress ; and John Massingbird's return to Australia was decided upon, and the day of his departure fixed. People surmised that Lionel would be glad to get rid of him, if only for the sake of his drawing-rooms. John Massingbird still lounged at full length on the amber satin couches, in dropping-off slippers or in dirty boots, as the case might be, still filled them with clouds of tobacco-smoke, so that you could not see across them. Mrs. Tynn declared, to as many people as she dared, that she prayed every night on her bended knees for Mr. Massingbird's departure, before the furniture should be quite ruined, or they burnt in their beds.

Mr. Massingbird was not going alone. Luke Roy was returning with him. Luke's intention always had been to return to Australia : he had but come home for a short visit to the old place and to see his mother. Luke had been doing well at the gold-fields. He did not dig ; but he sold liquor to those who did dig ; at which he was making money rapidly. He had a "chum," he said, who managed the store while he was away. So glowing was his account of his prospects, that old Roy had decided upon going also, and trying his fortune there. Mrs. Roy looked aghast at the projected plan : she was too old for it, she urged. But she could not turn her husband. He had never studied her wishes too much, and he was not likely to begin to do so now. So Mrs. Roy, with incessantly dropping tears, and continued prognostications that the sea sickness would kill

her, was forced to make her preparations for the voyage. Perhaps one motive, more than all else, influenced Roy's decision—the getting out of Deerham. Since his hopes of having something to do with the Verner's Pride estate—as he had in Stephen Verner's time—had been at an end, Roy had gone about in a perpetual state of inward mortification. This emigration would put an end to it: and what with the anticipation of making a fortune at the diggings, and what with his satisfaction at saying adieu to Deerham, and what with the thwarting of his wife, Roy was in a fever of complacency.

The time went on to the evening previous to the departure. Lionel and John Massingbird had dined alone, and now sat together at the open window, in the soft May twilight. A small table was at John's elbow; a bottle of rum, and a jar of tobacco, water and a glass being on it, ready to his hand. He had done his best to infect Lionel with a taste for rum-and-water—as a convenient beverage to be taken at any hour from seven o'clock in the morning onwards—but Lionel had been proof against it. John had the rum-drinking to himself, as he had the smoking. Lionel had behaved to him liberally. It was not in Lionel Verner's nature to behave otherwise, no matter to whom. From the moment the codicil was found, John Massingbird had no further right to a single sixpence of the revenues of the estate. He was in the position of one who has nothing. It was Lionel who had found means for all: for his expenses; his voyage; for a purse

when he should get to Australia. John Massingbird was thinking of this as he sat now, smoking and taking draughts of the rum-and-water.

"If ever I turn to work with a will and become a hundred-thousand-pound man, old fellow," he suddenly broke out, "I'll pay you back. This, and also what I got rid of while the estate was in my hands."

Lionel, who had been looking from the window in a reverie, turned round and laughed. To imagine John Massingbird becoming a hundred-thousand pound man through his own industry, was a stretch of fancy marvellously comprehensive.

"I have to make a clean breast of it to-night," resumed John Massingbird, after puffing away for some minutes in silence. "Do you remember my saying to you, the day we heard news of the codicil's being found, that I was in your debt?"

"I remember your saying it," replied Lionel. "I did not understand what you meant. You were not in my debt."

"Yes, I was. I had a score to pay off as big as the moon. It's as big still: for it's one that never can be paid off; never will be."

Lionel looked at him in surprise; his manner was so unusually serious.

"Fifty times, since I came back from Australia, have I been on the point of clearing myself of the secret. But, you see, there was Verner's Pride in the way. You would naturally have said upon hearing it, 'Give the place up to me; you can have

no moral right to it.' And I was not prepared to give it up ; it seemed too comfortable a nest, just at first, after the knocking about over yonder. Don't you perceive?"

"I don't perceive, and I don't understand," replied Lionel. "You are speaking in an unknown language."

"I'll speak in a known one, then. It was through me that old Ste Verner left Verner's Pride away from you."

"What!" uttered Lionel.

"True," nodded John, with composure. "I told him a—a bit of scandal of you. And the strait-laced old simpleton took and altered his will on the strength of it. I did not know of that until afterwards."

"And the scandal?" asked Lionel, quietly.
"What may it have been?"

"False scandal," carelessly answered John Massingbird. "But I thought it was true when I spoke it. I told your uncle that it was you who had played false with Rachel Frost."

"Massingbird!"

"Don't fancy I went to him open-mouthed, and said, 'Lionel Verner's the man.' A fellow who could do such a sneaking trick would be only fit for hanging. The avowal to him was surprised from me in an unguarded moment : it slipped out in self-defence. I'd better tell you the tale."

"I think you had," said Lionel.

"You remember the bother there was, the

commotion, the night Rachel was drowned. I came home and found Mr. Verner sitting at the inquiry. It never struck me, then, to suspect that it could be any one of us three who had been in the quarrel with Rachel. I knew that I had had no finger in the pie ; I had no cause to think that you had ; and, as to Fred, I'd as soon have suspected staid old Verner himself : besides, I believed Fred to have eyes only for Sibylla West. Not but that the affair appeared to me unaccountably strange ; for, beyond Verner's Pride, I did not think Rachel possessed an acquaintance."

He stopped to take a few whiffs at his pipe, and then resumed, Lionel listening in silence.

"On the following morning by daylight I went down to the pond, the scene of the previous night. A few stragglers were already there. As we were looking about and talking, I saw on the very brink of the pond, partially hidden in the grass,—in fact trodden into it, as it seemed to me,—a glove. I picked it up, and was on the point of calling out that I had found a glove, when it struck me that the glove was yours. The others had seen me stoop, and one of them asked if I had found anything. I said 'No.' I had crushed the glove in my hand, and presently I transferred it to my pocket."

"Your motive being good-nature to me?" interrupted Lionel.

"To be sure it was. To have shown that, as Lionel Verner's glove, would have fixed the affair

on your shoulders at once. Why should I tell? I had been in scrapes myself. And I kept it, saying nothing to anybody. I examined the glove privately, saw it was really yours, and of course I drew my own conclusions—that it was you who had been in the quarrel. Though what cause of dispute you could have with Rachel, I was at a loss to divine. Next came the inquest, and the medical men's revelation at it: and that cleared up the mystery. ‘Ho, ho,’ I said to myself, ‘so Master Lionel can do a bit of courting on his own account, steady as he seems.’ I—”

“Did you assume I threw her into the pond?” again interposed Lionel.

“Not a bit of it. What next, Lionel? The ignoring of some of the Commandments comes natural enough to the conscience; but the sixth—one does not ignore that. I believed that you and Rachel might have come to mutual logger-heads, and that she, in a passion, flung herself in. I held the glove still in my pocket; it seemed to be the safest place for it: and I intended, before I left, to hand it over to you, and to give you my word I'd keep counsel. On the night of the inquest, you were closeted in the study with Mr. Verner. I chafed at it, for I wished to be closeted with him myself. Unless I could get off from Verner's Pride the next day, there would be no chance of my sailing in the projected ship—where our passages had been already secured by Luke Roy. By-and-by you came into the dining-room—do you remember it?—

and told me Mr. Verner wanted me in the study. It was just what *I* wanted: and I went in. I shan't forget my surprise to the last hour of my life. His greeting was an accusation of me: of *me*: that it was I who had played false with Rachel. He had proof, he said. One of the house-girls had seen one of us three young men coming from the scene that night—and he, Stephen Verner, knew it could only be me. Fred was too cautious, he said; Lionel he could depend upon; and he bitterly declared that he would not give me a penny piece of the promised money, to take me on my way. A pretty state of things, was it not, Lionel, to have one's projects put an end to in that manner? In my dismay and anger, I blurted out the truth: that one of us might have been seen coming from the scene, but it was not myself; it was Lionel: and I took the glove out of my pocket and showed it to him."

John Massingbird paused to take a draught of the rum-and-water, and then resumed.

"I never saw any man so agitated as Mr. Verner. Upon my word, had I foreseen the effect the news would have had upon him, I hardly think I should have told it. His face turned ghastly; he lay back in his chair, uttering groans of despair; in short, it had completely prostrated him. I never knew how deeply he must have been attached to you, Lionel, until that night."

"He believed the story?" said Lionel.

"Of course he believed it," assented John Massingbird. "I told it him as a certainty, as a thing

about which there was no admission for the slightest doubt : I assumed it, myself, to be a certainty, when he was a little recovered, he took possession of the glove, and bound me to secrecy. You would never have forgotten it, Lionel, had you seen his shaking hands, his imploring eyes, heard his voice of despair; all lifted to beseech secrecy for you—for the sake of his dead brother—for the name of Verner—for his own sake. I heartily promised it : and he handed me over a more liberal sum than even I had expected, enjoined me to depart with the morrow's dawn, and bade me God-speed. I believe he was glad that I was going, lest I might drop some chance word during the present excitement of Deerham, and by that means direct suspicion to you. He need not have feared. I was already abusing myself mentally for having told *him*, although it had gained me my ends : 'Live and let live' had been my motto hitherto. The interview was nearly over when you came to interrupt it, asking if Mr. Verner would see Robin Frost. Mr. Verner answered that he might come in. He came; you and Fred with him. Do you recollect old Verner's excitement?—his vehement words in answer to Robin's request that a reward should be posted up? 'He'll never be found, Robin—the villain will never be found, so long as you and I and the world shall last.' I recollect them, you see, word for word, to this hour: but none, save myself, knew what caused Mr. Verner's excitement, or that the word 'villain' was applied to you. Upon my word and honour, old boy, I felt

as if I had the deeper right to it ! and I felt angry with old Verner for looking at the affair in so strong a light. But there was no help for it. I went away the next morning—”

“ Stay ! ” interrupted Lionel. “ A single word to me would have set the misapprehension straight. Why did you not speak it ? ”

“ I wish I had, now. But—it wasn’t done. There ! The knowledge that turns up in the future we can’t call to aid in the present. If I had had a doubt that it was you, I should have spoken. We were some days out at sea on our voyage to Australia when I and Luke got comparing notes ; and I found, to my everlasting astonishment, that it was not you, after all, who had been with Rachel, but Fred.”

“ You should have written home, to do me justice with Mr. Verner. You ought not to have delayed one instant, when the knowledge came to you.”

“ And how was I to send the letter ? Chuck it into the sea in the ship’s wake, and give it orders to swim back to port ? ”

“ You might have posted it at the first place you touched at.”

“ Look here, Lionel. I never regarded it in that grave light. How was I to suppose that old Verner would disinherit you for that trumpery escapade ? I never knew why he had disinherited you, until I came home and heard from yourself the story of the enclosed glove, which he left you as a legacy. It’s since then that I have been wanting

to make a clean breast of it. I say, only fancy Fred's deepness ! We should never have thought it of him. The quarrel between him and Rachel that night appeared to arise from the fact of her having seen him with Sibylla; having overheard that there was more between them than was pleasant to *her*. At least, so far as Luke could gather it. Lionel, what should have brought your glove lying by the pond ? ”

“ I am unable to say. I had not been there, to drop it. The most feasible solution that I can come to, is, that Rachel may have had it about her for the purpose of mending, and let it drop herself, when she jumped in.”

“ Ay. That’s the most likely. There was a hole in it, I remember ; and it was Rachel who attended to such things in the household. It must have been so.”

Lionel fell into a reverie. How—but for this mistake of John Massingbird’s, this revelation to his uncle—the whole course of his life’s events might have been changed ! Verner’s Pride bequeathed to him, never bequeathed at all to the Massingbirds, it was scarcely likely that Sibylla, in returning home, would have driven to Verner’s Pride. Had she *not* driven to it that night, he might never have been so surprised by his old feelings as to have proposed to her. He might have married Lucy Tempest; have lived, sheltered with her in Verner’s Pride from the storms of life ; he might—”

"Will you forgive me, old chap?"

It was John Massingbird who spoke, interrupting his day dreams. Lionel shook them off, and took the offered hand stretched out.

"Yes," he heartily said. "You did not do me the injury intentionally. It was the result of a mistake, brought about by circumstances."

"No, that I did not, by Jove!" answered John Massingbird. "I don't think I ever did a fellow an intentional injury in my life. You would have been the last I should single out for it. I have had many ups and downs, Lionel, but somehow I have hitherto always managed to alight on my legs; and I believe it's because I let other folks get along. Tit for tat, you see. A fellow who is for ever putting his hindering spoke in the wheel of others, is safe to get hindering spokes put into his. I am not a pattern model," comically added John Massingbird; "but I have never done wilful injury to others, and my worst enemy (if I possess one) can't charge it upon me."

True enough. With all Mr. John Massingbird's failings, his heart was not a bad one. In the old days his escapades had been numerous; his brother Frederick's, none (so far as the world knew); but the one was liked a thousand times better than the other.

"We part friends, old fellow!" he said to Lionel the following morning, when all was ready, and the final moment of departure had come.

"To be sure we do," answered Lionel. "Should

England ever see you again, you will not forget Verner's Pride."

"I don't think it ever will see me again. Thanks, old chap, all the same. If I should be done up some unlucky day for the want of a twenty-pound note, you won't refuse to let me have it, for old times' sake?"

"Very well," laughed Lionel.

And so they parted. And Verner's Pride was quit of Mr. John Massingbird, and Deerham of its long-looked-upon *bête noire*, old Grip Roy. Luke had gone forward to make arrangements for the sailing, as he had done once before; and Mrs. Roy took her seat with her husband in a third-class carriage, crying enough tears to float the train.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MEDICAL ATTENDANCE GRATIS, INCLUDING PHYSIC.

As a matter of course, the discovery of the codicil, and the grave charge it served to establish against Dr. West, could not be hid under a bushel. Deerham was remarkably free in its comments, and was pleased to rake up various unpleasant reports, which from time to time in the former days had arisen, touching that gentleman. Deerham might say what it liked, and nobody be much the worse ; but a more serious question arose with Jan. Easy as Jan was, little given to think ill, even he could not look over this. Jan, if he would maintain his respectability as a medical man and a gentleman, if he would retain his higher class of patients, he must give up his association with Dr. West.

The finding of the codicil had been communicated to Dr. West by Matiss, the lawyer, who officially demanded at the same time an explanation of its having been placed where it was found. The doctor replied to the communication, but conveniently ignored the question. He was "charmed" to hear that the long-missing deed was found, which restored Verner's Pride to the rightful owner, Lionel Verner : but he appeared not to have read, or else not to have understood the very broad hint implicating himself;

for not a word was returned to that part, in answer. The silence was not less a conclusive proof than the admission of guilt would have been ; and it was so regarded by those concerned.

Jan was the next to write. A characteristic letter. He said not a word of reproach to the doctor ; he appeared, indeed, to ignore the facts as completely as the doctor himself had done in answer to Matiss ; he simply said that he would prefer to "get along" now alone. The practice had much increased, and there was room for them both. He would remove to another residence ; a lodging would do, he said ; and run his chance of patients coming to him. It was not his intention to take one from Dr. West by solicitation. The doctor could either come back and resume practice in person, or take a partner in place of him, Jan.

To this a bland answer was received. Dr. West was agreeable to the dissolution of partnership ; but he had no intention of resuming practice in Deerham. He and his noble charge (who was decidedly benefiting by his care, skill, and companionship, he elaborately wrote), were upon the best of terms : his engagement with him was likely to be a long one (for the poor youth would require a personal guide up to his fortieth year, nay, to his eightieth, if he lived so long) : and therefore (not to be fettered) he, Dr. West, was anxious to sever his ties with Deerham. He should never return to it. If Mr. Jan would undertake to pay him a trifling sum, say five hundred pounds, or so, he could have the entire

business; and the purchase-money, if more convenient, might be paid by instalments. Mr. Jan of course would become sole proprietor of the house, (the rent of which had hitherto been paid out of the joint concern,) but perhaps he would not object to allow those “two poor old things, Deborah and Amilly, a corner in it.” *He* should of course undertake to provide for them, remitting them a liberal annual sum.

In writing this, fair, nay liberal, as the offered terms appeared to the sight of single-hearted Jan, Dr. West had probably possessed as great an eye as ever to his own interest. He had a shrewd suspicion that, the house divided, his, Dr. West’s, would stand but a poor chance against Jan Verner’s. That Jan would be entirely true and honourable in not soliciting the old patients to come to him, he knew; but he equally knew that the patients would flock to Jan unsolicited. Dr. West had not lived in ignorance of what was going on in Deerham; he had one or two private correspondents there; besides the open ones, his daughters and Jan; and he had learnt how popular Jan had grown with all classes. Yes, it was decidedly politic on Dr. West’s part to offer Jan terms of purchase. And Jan closed with them.

“I couldn’t have done it six months ago, you know, Lionel,” he said to his brother. “But now that you have come in again to Verner’s Pride, you won’t care to have my earnings any longer.”

“What I shall care for now, Jan, will be to repay

you; so far as I can. The money can be repaid: the kindness never."

"Law!" cried Jan, "that's nothing. Wouldn't you have done as much for me? To go back to old West: I shall be able to complete the purchase in little more than a year, taking it out of the profits. The expenses will be something considerable. There'll be the house, and the horses, for I must have two, and I shall take a qualified assistant as soon as Cheese leaves, which will be in autumn; but there'll be a margin of six or seven hundred a-year profit left me then. And the business is increasing. Yes, I shall be able to pay him out in a year, or thereabouts. In offering me these easy terms, I think he is behaving liberally. Don't you, Lionel?"

"That may be a matter of opinion, Jan," was Lionel's answer. "He has stood to me in the relation of father-in-law, and I don't care to express mine too definitely. He is wise enough to know that when you leave him, his chance of practice is gone. But I don't advise you to cavil with the terms. I should say, accept them."

"I have done it," answered Jan. "I wrote this morning. I must get a new brass plate for the door. 'Jan Verner, Surgeon, &c.,' in place of the present one, 'West and Verner.'"

"I think I should put Janus Verner, instead of Jan," suggested Lionel, with a half smile.

"Law!" repeated Jan. "Nobody would know it was meant for me if I put Janus. Shall I have 'Mr.' tacked on to it, Lionel?—'Mr. Jan Verner.'"

"Of course you will," answered Lionel. "What is going to be done about Deborah and Amilly West?"

"In what way?"

"As to their residence?"

"You saw what Dr. West says in his letter. They can stop."

"It is not a desirable arrangement, Jan, their remaining in the house."

"They won't hurt me," responded Jan. "They are welcome."

"I think, Jan, your connection with the West family should be entirely closed. The opportunity offers now: and, if not embraced, you don't know when another may arise. Suppose, a short while hence, you were to marry? It might be painful to your feelings, then, to have to say to Deborah and Amilly — 'You must leave my house: there's no further place for you in it.' Now, in this dissolution of partnership, the change can take place as in the natural course of events."

Jan had opened his great eyes wonderingly at the words. "I marry!" uttered he. "What should bring me marrying?"

"You may be marrying sometime, Jan."

"Not I," answered Jan. "Nobody would have me. They can stop on in the house, Lionel. What does it matter? I don't see how I and Cheese should get on without them. Who'd make the pies? Cheese would die of chagrin, if he didn't get one every day."

"I see a great deal of inconvenience in the way," persisted Lionel. "The house will be yours then. Upon what terms would they remain? As visitors, as lodgers—as what?"

Jan opened his eyes wider. "Visitors! lodgers!" cried he. "I don't know what you mean, Lionel. They'd stop on as they always have done—as though the house were theirs. They'd be welcome, for me."

"You must do as you like, Jan. But I do not think the arrangement a desirable one. It would be establishing a claim which Dr. West may be presuming upon later. With his daughters in the house, as of right, he may be for coming back some time and taking up his abode in it. It would be better for you and the Miss Wests to separate; to have your establishments apart."

"I shall never turn them out," said Jan. "They'd break their hearts. Look at the buttons, too! Who'd sew them on? Cheese bursts off two a day, good."

"As you please, Jan. My motive in speaking was not ill-nature towards the Miss Wests; but regard for you. As the sisters of my late wife, I shall take care that they do not want—should their resources from Dr. West fail. He speaks of allowing them a liberal sum annually: but I fear they must not make sure that the promise will be carried out. Should it not be, they will have no one to look to, I expect, but myself."

"They won't want much," said Jan. "Just a

trifle for their bonnets and shoes, and such like. I shall pay the house-bills, you know. In fact I'd as soon give them enough for their clothes, as not. I dare say I should have it, even the first year, after paying expenses and old West's five hundred."

It was hopeless to contend with Jan upon the subject of money, especially when it was *his* money. Lionel said no more. But he had not the slightest doubt it would end in Jan's house being saddled with the Miss Wests : and that help for them from Dr. West would never come.

Miss West herself was thinking the same—that help from her father never would come.

This conversation between Jan and Lionel, had taken place at Verner's Pride, in the afternoon subsequent to the arrival of Dr. West's letter. Deborah West had also received one from her father. She learnt by it that he was about to retire from the partnership, and that Mr. Jan Verner would carry on the practice alone. The doctor intimated that she and Amilly would continue to live on in the house with Mr. Jan's permission, whom he had asked to afford them house-room : and he more loudly promised to transmit them one hundred pounds per annum, in stated payments, as might be convenient to him.

The letter was read three times over by both sisters. Amilly did not like it, but upon Deborah it made a painfully deep impression. Poor ladies ! Since the discovery of the codicil they had gone about Deerham with veils over their faces and their

heads down, inclined to think that lots in this world were dealt out all too unequally.

At the very time that Jan was at Verner's Pride that afternoon, Deborah sat alone in the dining-room, pondering over the future. Since the finding of the codicil, neither of the sisters had cared to seat themselves in state in the drawing-room, ready to receive visitors, should they call. They had no heart for it. They chose, rather, to sit in plain attire, and hide themselves in the humblest and most retired apartment. They took no pride now in anointing their scanty curls with castor oil, in contriving for their dress, in setting off their persons. Vanity seemed to have gone out for Deborah and Amilly West.

Deborah sat there in the dining-room, her hair looking grievously thin, her morning dress of black print with white spots upon it not changed for the old turned black silk of the afternoon. Her elbow rested on the faded and not very clean table-cover, and her fingers were running unconsciously through that scanty hair. The prospect before her looked, to her mind, as hopelessly forlorn as she looked.

But it was necessary that she should gaze at the future steadily; should not turn aside from it in carelessness or in apathy; should face it, and make the best of it. If Jan Verner and her father were about to dissolve partnership, and the practice henceforth was to be Jan's, what was to become of her and Amilly? Taught by past experience, *she* knew how much dependence was to be placed upon

her father's promise to pay to them an income. Very little reliance indeed could be placed on Dr. West in any way; this very letter in her hand and the tidings it contained, might be true, or might be — pretty little cullings from Dr. West's imagination. The proposed dissolution of partnership she believed in: she had expected Jan to take the step ever since that night which restored the codicil.

"I had better ask Mr. Jan about it," she murmured. "It is of no use to remain in this uncertainty."

Rising from her seat, she proceeded to the side-door, opened it, and glanced cautiously out through the rain, not caring to be seen by strangers in her present attire. There was nobody about, and she crossed the little path and entered the surgery. Master Cheese, with somewhat of a scorchy look in the eyebrows, but full of strength and appetite as ever, turned round at her entrance.

"Is Mr. Jan in?" she asked.

"No, he is not," responded Master Cheese, speaking indistinctly, for he had just filled his mouth with Spanish liquorice. "Did you want him, Miss Deb?"

"I wanted to speak to him," she replied. "Will he be long?"

"He didn't announce the hour of his return," replied Master Cheese. "I wish he *would* come back! If a message came for one of us, I don't care to go out in this rain: Jan doesn't mind it. It's sure to be my luck! The other day, when it

was pouring cats and dogs, a summons came from Lady Hautley's. Jan was out, and I had to go, and got dripping wet. After all, it was only my lady's maid, with a rubbishing whitlow on her finger."

"Be so kind as tell Mr. Jan, when he does come in, that I should be glad to speak a word to him, if he can find time to step into the parlour."

Miss Deb turned back as she spoke, ran across through the rain, and sat down in the parlour, as before. She knew that she ought to go up and dress, but she had not spirits for it.

She sat there until Jan entered. Full an hour, it must have been, and she had turned over all points in her mind, what could and what could not be done. It did not appear much that could be. Jan came in, rather wet. On his road from Verner's Pride he had overtaken one of his poor patients, who was in delicate health, and had lent the woman his huge cotton umbrella, hastening on, himself, without one.

"Cheese says you wish to see me, Miss Deb."

Miss Deb turned round from her listless attitude, and asked Mr. Jan to take a chair. Mr. Jan responded by partially sitting down on the arm of one.

"What is it?" asked he, rather wondering.

"I have had a letter from Prussia this morning, Mr. Jan, from my father. He says you and he are about to dissolve partnership; that the practice will be carried on by you alone, on your own

account; and that—but you had better read it," she broke off, taking the letter from her pocket, and handing it to Jan.

He ran his eyes over it. Dr. West's was not a plain handwriting, but Jan was accustomed to it. The letter was soon read.

"It's true, Miss Deb." "The doctor thinks he shall not be returning to Deerham, and so I am going to take to the whole of the practice," continued Jan, who possessed too much innate good feeling to hint to Miss Deb of any other cause.

"Yes. But—it will place me and Amilly in a very embarrassing position, Mr. Jan," added the poor lady, her thin cheeks flushing painfully. "I—we shall have no right to remain in this house then."

"You are welcome to remain," said Jan.

Miss Deb shook her head. She felt, as she said, that they should have no "right."

"I'd rather you did," pursued Jan, in his good-nature. "What do I and Cheese want with all this big house to ourselves? Besides, if you and Amilly go, who'd see to our shirts and the puddings?"

"When papa went away at first, was there not some arrangement made by which the furniture became yours?"

"No," stoutly answered Jan. "I paid something to him, to give me, as he called it, a half-share in it with himself. It was a stupid sort of arrangement, and one that I should never care to

act upon, Miss Deb. The furniture is yours; not mine."

"Mr. Jan, you would give up your right in everything, I believe. You will never get rich."

"I shall get as rich as I want to, I daresay," was Jan's answer. "Things can go on just the same as usual, you know, Miss Deb, and I can pay the housekeeping bills. Your stopping here will be a saving," good-naturedly added Jan. "With nobody in the house to manage, except servants, only think the waste there'd be! Cheese would be for getting two dinners a day served, fish, and fowls, and tarts at each."

The tears were struggling in Deborah West's eyes. She did her best to repress them: but it could not be, and she gave way with a burst.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jan," she said. "Sometimes I feel as if there was no longer any place in the world for me and Amilly. You may be sure I would not mention it, but that you know it as well as I do—that there is, I fear, no dependence to be placed on this promise of papa's, to allow us an income. I have been thinking—."

"Don't let that trouble you, Miss Deb," interrupted Jan, tilting himself backwards over the arm of the chair in a very ungraceful fashion, and leaving his legs dangling. "Others will, if he wo—if he can't. Lionel has just been saying that as Sibylla's sisters, he shall see that you don't want."

"You and he are very kind," she answered, the tears dropping faster than she could wipe them

away. "But it seems to me the time is come when we ought to try and do something for ourselves. I have been thinking, Mr. Jan, that we might get a few pupils, I and Amilly. There's not a single good school in Deerham, as you know; I think we might establish one."

"So you might," said Jan, "if you'd like it."

"We should both like it. And perhaps you'd not mind our staying on in this house while we were getting a few together; establishing it, as it were. They would not put you out, I hope, Mr. Jan."

"Not they," answered Jan. "I shouldn't eat them. Look here, Miss Deb, I'd doctor them for nothing. Couldn't you put that in the prospectus? It might prove an attraction."

It was a novel feature in a school prospectus, and Miss Deb had to take some minutes to consider it. She came to the conclusion that it would look remarkably well in print. "Medical attendance gratis."

"Including physic," put in Jan.

"Medical attendance gratis, including physic," repeated Miss Deb. "Mr. Jan, it would be sure to take with the parents. I am so much obliged to you. But I hope," she added, moderating her tone of satisfaction, "that they'd not think it meant Master Cheese. People would not have much faith in him, I fear."

"Tell them to the contrary," answered Jan. "And Cheese will be leaving shortly, you know."

"True," said Miss Deb. "Mr. Jan," she added, a strange eagerness in her tone, in her meek blue eyes, "if we, I and Amilly, can only get into the way of doing something for ourselves, by which we may be a little independent, and look forward to be kept out of the workhouse in our old age, we shall feel as if removed from a dreadful nightmare. Circumstances have been preying upon us, Mr. Jan : the care is making us begin to look old before we might have looked it."

Jan answered with a laugh. That notion of the workhouse was so good, he said. As well set on and think that he should come to the penitentiary ! It had been no laughing matter, though, to the hearts of the two sisters, and Miss Deb sat on, crying silent tears.

How many of these silent tears must be shed in the path through life ! It would appear that the lot of some is only made to shed them, and to bear.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT LAST !

MEANWHILE the spring was going on to summer—and in the strict order of precedence that conversation of Miss Deb's with Jan ought to have been related before the departure of John Massingbird and the Roys from Deerham. But it does not signify. The Miss Wests made their arrangements and sent out their prospectuses, and the others left: it all happened in the spring-time. That time was giving place to summer when the father of Lucy Tempest, now Colonel Sir Henry Tempest, landed in England.

In some degree his arrival was sudden. He had been looked for so long, that Lucy had almost given over looking for him. She did believe he was on his road home, by the sea passage, but precisely when he might be expected, she did not know.

Since the marriage of Decima, Lucy had lived on alone with Lady Verner. Alone, and very quietly; quite uneventfully. She and Lionel met occasionally, but nothing further had passed between them. Lionel was silent: possibly he deemed it too soon after his wife's death to speak of love to another: although the speaking of it would have

been news to neither. Lucy was a great deal at Lady Hautley's. Decima would have had her there permanently : but Lady Verner negatived it.

They were sitting at breakfast one morning, Lady Verner and Lucy, when the letter arrived. It was the only one by the post that morning. Catherine laid it by Lady Verner's side, to whom it was addressed : but the quick eyes of Lucy caught the superscription.

"Lady Verner ! It is papa's handwriting."

Lady Verner turned her head to look at it. "It is not an Indian letter," she remarked.

"No. Papa must have landed."

Opening the letter, they found it to be so. Sir Henry had arrived at Southampton. Lucy turned pale with agitation. It seemed a formidable thing, now it had come so close, to meet her father, whom she had not seen for so many years.

"When is he coming here ?" she breathlessly asked.

"To-morrow," replied Lady Verner ; not speaking until she had glanced over the whole contents of the letter. "He purposed to remain a day and a night with us, and then he will take you with him to London."

"But a day and a night ! Go away then to London ! Shall I never come back ?" reiterated Lucy, more breathlessly than before.

Lady Verner looked at her with calm surprise. "One would think, child, you wanted to remain in Deerham. Were I a young lady, I should be glad

to get away from it. The London season is at its height."

Lucy laughed and blushed somewhat consciously. She thought she should not care about the London season; but she did not say so to Lady Verner. Lady Verner resumed.

"Sir Henry wishes me to accompany you, Lucy, I suppose I must do so. What a vast deal we shall have to think of to-day! We shall be able to do nothing to-morrow when Sir Henry is here."

Lucy toyed with her tea-spoon, toyed with her breakfast: but the capability of eating more had left her. The suddenness of the announcement had taken away her appetite, and a hundred doubts were tormenting her. Should she never again return to Deerham?—never again see Li—

"We must make a call or two to-day, Lucy."

The interruption, breaking in upon her busy thoughts, caused her to start. Lady Verner resumed.

"This morning must be devoted to business; to the giving directions as to clothes, packing, and such like. I can tell you, Lucy, that you will have a great deal of it to do yourself; Catherine's so incapable since she got that rheumatism in her hand. Thérèse will have enough to see to with my things."

"I can do it all," answered Lucy. "I can—"

"What next, my dear? *You pack!* Though Catherine's hand is painful, she can do something."

"Oh, yes, we shall manage very well," cheerfully

answered Lucy. "Did you say we should have to go out, Lady Verner?"

"This afternoon. For one place, we must go to the Bitterworths. You cannot go away without seeing them, and Mrs. Bitterworth is too ill just now to call upon you. I wonder whether Lionel will be here to-day?"

It was a "wonder" which had been crossing Lucy's own heart. She went to her room after breakfast, and soon became deep in her preparations with old Catherine; Lucy doing the chief part of the work, in spite of Catherine's remonstrances. But her thoughts were not with her hands; they remained buried in that speculation of Lady Verner's — would Lionel be there that day?

The time went on to the afternoon, and he had not come. They stepped into the carriage (for Lady Verner could indulge in the luxury of horses again now) to make their calls, and he had not come. Lucy's heart palpitated strangely at the doubt of whether she should really depart without seeing him. A very improbable doubt, considering the contemplated arrival at Deerham Court of Sir Henry Tempest.

As they passed Dr. West's old house, Lady Verner ordered the carriage to turn the corner and stop at the door. "Mr. Jan Verner" was on the plate now, where "West and Verner" used to be. Master Cheese unwillingly disturbed himself to come out, for he was seated over a washhand-basin of gooseberry fool, which he had got surreptitiously made

for him in the kitchen. Mr. Jan was out, he said.

So Lady Verner ordered the carriage on, leaving a message for Jan that she wanted some more "drops" made up.

They paid the visit to Mrs. Bitterworth. Mr. Bitterworth was not at home. He had gone to see Mr. Verner. A sudden beating of the heart, a rising flush in the cheeks, a mist for a moment before her eyes, and Lucy was being whirled to Verner's Pride. Lady Verner had ordered the carriage thither, as they left Mrs. Bitterworth's.

They found them both in the drawing-room. Mr. Bitterworth had just risen to leave, and was shaking hands with Lionel. Lady Verner interrupted them with the news of Lucy's departure; of her own.

"Sir Henry will be here to-morrow," she said to Lionel. "He takes Lucy to London with him the following day, and I accompany them."

Lionel, startled, looked round at Lucy. She was not looking at him. Her eyes were averted—her face was flushed.

"But you are not going for good, Miss Lucy!" cried Mr. Bitterworth.

"She is," replied Lady Verner. "And glad enough, I am sure, she must be, to get away from stupid Deerham. She little thought, when she came to it, that her sojourn in it would be so long as this. I have seen the rebellion, at her having to stop in it, rising often."

Mr. Bitterworth went out on the terrace. Lady

Verner, talking to him, went also. Lionel, his face pale, his breath coming in gasps, turned to Lucy.

“*Need you go for good, Lucy?*”

She raised her eyes to him with a shy glance, and Lionel, with a half-uttered exclamation of emotion, caught her to his breast, and took his first long silent kiss of love from her lips. It was not like those snatched kisses of years ago.

“My darling! my darling! God alone knows what my love for you has been.”

Another shy glance at him through her raining tears. Her heart was beating against his. Did the glance seem to ask why, then, had he not spoken? His next words would imply that he understood it so.

“I am still a poor man, Lucy. I was waiting for Sir Henry’s return, to lay the case before him. He may refuse you to me!”

“If he should—I will tell him—that I shall never have further interest in life,” was her agitated answer.

And Lionel’s own face was working with emotion, as he kissed those tears away.

At last! at last!

CHAPTER XXXI.

LADY VERNER'S "FEAR."

THE afternoon express-train was steaming into Deerham-station, just as Jan Verner was leaping his long legs over rails and stones and shafts, and other obstacles apt to collect round the outside of a halting-place for trains, to get to it. Jan did not want to get to the train ; he had no business with it. He only wished to say a word to one of the railway-porters, whose wife he was attending. By the time he had reached the platform the train was puffing on again, and the few passengers who had descended were about to disperse.

"Can you tell me my way to Lady Verner's?"

The words were spoken close to Jan's ear. He turned and looked at the speaker. An oldish man with a bronzed countenance and upright carriage, bearing about him that indescribable military air which bespeaks the soldier of long service, in plain clothes though he may be.

"Sir Henry Tempest?" involuntarily spoke Jan, before the official addressed had time to answer the question. "I heard that my mother was expecting you."

"Sir Henry Tempest ran his eyes over Jan's face

and figure. An honest face, but an ungainly figure : loose clothes, that would have been all the better for a brush, and the edges of his high shirt-collar jagged out.

"Mr. Verner?" responded Sir Henry, doubtfully.

"Not Mr. Verner. I'm only Jan. You must have forgotten me long ago, Sir Henry."

Sir Henry Tempest held out his hand. "I have not forgotten what you were as a boy; but I should not have known you as a man. And yet—it is the same face."

"Of course it is," said Jan. "Ugly faces, such as mine, don't alter. I will walk with you to my mother's: it is close by. Have you any luggage?"

"Only a portmanteau. My servant is looking after it. Here he is."

A very dark man came up—an Indian—nearly as old as his master. Jan recognised him.

"I remember you!" he exclaimed. "It is Batsha."

The man laughed, hiding his dark eyes, but showing his white teeth. "Massa Jan!" he said. "Used to call me Bat."

Without the least ceremony, Jan shook him by the hand. He had more pleasant reminiscences of him than of his master. In fact, Jan could only remember Colonel Tempest by name. He, the Colonel, had despised and shunned the awkward and unprepossessing boy: but the boy and Bat used to be great friends.

"Do you recollect carrying me on your shoulder,

Bat? You have paid for many a ride in a palanquin for me. Riding on shoulders or in palanquins, in those days, used to be my choice recreation. The shoulders and the funds both ran short at times."

Batsha remembered it all. Next to his master, he had never liked anybody so well as the boy Jan.

"Stop where you are a minute or two," said unceremonious Jan to Sir Henry. "I must find one of the porters, and then I'll walk with you."

Looking about in various directions, in holes and corners and sheds,—inside carriages and behind trucks, Jan at length came upon a short, surly-looking man, wearing the official uniform. It was the one of whom he was in search.

"I say, Parkes, what is this I hear about your forcing your wife to get up, when I have given orders that she should lie in bed? I went in just now, and there I found her dragging herself about the damp brewhouse. I had desired that she should not get out of her bed."

"Too much bed don't do nobody much good, sir," returned the man in a semi-resentful tone. "There's the work to do—the washing: if she don't do it, who will?"

"Too much bed wouldn't do you good; or me, either: but it is necessary for your wife in her present state of illness. I have ordered her to bed again. Don't let me hear of your interfering a second time, and forcing her up. She is going to have a blister on now."

"I didn't force her, sir," answered Parkes. "I

only asked her what was to become of the work, and how I should get a clean shirt to put on."

"If I had got a sick wife, I'd wash out my shirt myself, before I'd drag her out of bed to do it," retorted Jan. "I can tell you one thing, Parkes: that she is worse than you think for. I am not sure that she will be long with you: and you won't get such a wife again in a hurry, once you lose her. Give her a chance to get well. I'll see that she gets up fast enough, when she is fit for it."

Parkes touched his peaked cap as Jan turned away. It was very rare that Jan came out with a lecture: and when he did, the sufferers did not like it. A sharp word from Jan Verner seemed to tell home.

Jan returned to Sir Henry Tempest, and they walked away in the direction of Deerham Court.

"I conclude all is well at Lady Verner's," remarked Sir Henry.

"Well enough," returned Jan. "I thought I heard you were not coming until to-morrow. They'll be surprised."

"I wrote word I should be with them to-morrow," replied Sir Henry. "But I got impatient to see my child. Since I left India and have been fairly on my way to her, the time of separation has seemed longer to me than it did in all the previous years."

"She's a nice girl," returned Jan. "The nicest girl in Deerham."

"Is she pretty?" asked Sir Henry.

The question a little puzzled Jan. "Well, I

think so," answered he. "Girls are much alike for that, as far as I see. I like Miss Lucy's look, though: and that's the chief thing in faces."

"How is your brother, Janus?"

Jan burst out laughing. "Don't call me Janus, Sir Henry. I am not known by that name. They wanted me to have Janus on my door-plate; but nobody would have thought it meant me, and the practice might have gone off."

"You are Jan, as you used to be, then? I remember Lucy has called you so in her letters to me."

"I shall never be anything but Jan. What does it matter? One name's as good as another. You were asking after Lionel. He has got Verner's Pride again. All in safety now."

"What a very extraordinary course of events seems to have taken place, with regard to Verner's Pride!" remarked Sir Henry. "Now your brother's, now not his; then his again, then not his! I cannot make it out."

"It was extraordinary," assented Jan. "But the uncertain tenure is at an end, and Lionel is installed there for life. There ought never to have been any question of his right to it."

"He has had the misfortune to lose his wife," observed Sir Henry.

"It was not much of a misfortune," returned Jan, always plain. "She was too sickly ever to enjoy life: and I know she must have worried Lionel nearly out of his patience."

Jan had said at the station that Deerham Court was "close by." His active legs may have found it so; but Sir Henry began to think it rather far, than close. As they reached the gates Sir Henry spoke.

"I suppose there is an inn near, where I can send my servant to lodge. There may not be accommodation for him at Lady Verner's?"

"There's accommodation enough for that," said Jan. "They have plenty of room, and old Catherine can make him up a bed."

Lady Verner and Lucy were out. They had not returned from the call on Mrs. Bitterworth—for it was the afternoon spoken of in the last chapter. Jan showed Sir Henry in; told him to ring for any refreshment he wanted; and then left.

"I can't stay," he remarked. "My day's rounds are not over yet."

But scarcely had Jan reached the outside of the gate when he met the carriage. He put up his hand, and the coachman stopped. Jan advanced to the window, a broad smile upon his face.

"What will you give me for some news, Miss Lucy?"

Lucy's thoughts were running upon certain other news; news known but to herself and to one more. A strangely happy light shone in her soft brown eyes, as she turned them on Jan; a rich damask flush on the cheeks where *his* lips had so lately been.

"Does it concern me, Jan?"

"It doesn't much concern anybody else. — Guess."

"I never can guess anything; you know I can't, Jan," she answered, smiling. "You must please tell me."

"Well," said Jan, "there's an arrival. Come by the train."

"Oh, Jan! Not papa?"

Jan nodded.

"You will find him in-doors. Old Bat's come with him."

Lucy never could quite remember the details of the meeting. She knew that her father held her to him fondly, and then put her from him to look at her; the tears blinding her eyes and his.

"You *are* pretty, Lucy," he said. "Very pretty. I asked Jan whether you were not, but he could not tell me."

"Jan!" slightly spoke Lady Verner, while Lucy laughed in spite of her tears. "It is of no use asking Jan anything of that sort, Sir Henry. I don't believe Jan knows one young lady's face from another."

It seemed to be all confusion for some time: all bustle; nothing but questions and answers. But when they had assembled in the drawing-room again, after making ready for dinner, things wore a calmer aspect.

"You must have thought I never was coming home!" remarked Sir Henry to Lady Verner. "I have contemplated it so long."

"I suppose your delays were unavoidable," she answered.

"Yes—in a measure. I should not have come now, but for the relieving you of Lucy. Your letters, for some time past, have appeared to imply that you were vexed with her; or tired of her. And in truth I have taxed your patience and goodnature unwarrantably. I do not know how I shall repay your kindness, Lady Verner."

"I have been repaid throughout, Sir Henry," was the quiet reply of Lady Verner. "The society of Lucy has been a requital in full. I rarely form an attachment, and when I do form one it is never demonstrative; but I have learned to love Lucy as I love my own daughter, and it will be a real grief to part with her. Not but that she has given me great vexation."

"Ah! In what way?"

"The years have gone on and on since she came to me; and I was in hopes of returning her to you with some prospect in view of the great end of a young lady's life—marriage. I was placed here as her mother; and I felt more responsibility in regard to her establishment in life than I did to Decima's. We have been at issue upon the point, Sir Henry: Lucy and I."

Sir Henry turned his eyes on his daughter. If that is not speaking figuratively, considering that he had scarcely taken his eyes off her. A fair picture she was, sitting there in her white evening dress and her pearl ornaments. Young, lovely,

girlish, she looked, as she did the first day she came to Lady Verner's and took up her modest seat on the hearth-rug. Sir Henry Tempest had not seen many such faces as that ; he had not met with many natures so innocent and charming. Lucy was made to be admired as well as loved.

" If there is one *parti* more desirable than another in the whole county, it is Lord Garle," resumed Lady Verner. " The eldest son of the Earl of Elmsley, his position naturally renders him so : but had he neither rank nor wealth, he would not be much less desirable. His looks are prepossessing ; his qualities of head and heart are admirable ; he enjoys the respect of all. Not a young lady for miles round but—I will use a vulgar phrase, Sir Henry, but it is expressive of the facts—would jump at him. Lucy refused him.

" Indeed," replied Sir Henry, gazing at Lucy's glowing face, at the smile that hovered round her lips. Lady Verner resumed :

" She refused him in the most decidedly positive manner that you can imagine. She has refused also one or two others. They were not so desirable in position as Lord Garle ; but they were very well. And her motive I never have been able to get at. It has vexed me much : I have pointed out to her that whenever you returned home, you might think I had been neglectful of her interests."

" No, no," replied Sir Henry, " I could not fancy coming home to find Lucy married. I should not

have liked it: she would have seemed to be gone from me."

"But she must marry some time, and the years are going on," returned Lady Verner.

"Yes, I suppose she must."

"At least, I should say she would, were it anybody but Lucy," rejoined Lady Verner, qualifying her words. "After the refusal of Lord Garle, one does not know what to think. You will see him and judge for yourself."

"What was the motive of the refusal, Lucy?" inquired Sir Henry.

He spoke with a smile, in a gay, careless tone; but Lucy appeared to take the question in a serious light. Her eyelids drooped, her whole face became scarlet, her demeanour almost agitated.

"I did not care to marry, papa," she answered in a low tone. "I did not care for Lord Garle."

"One grievous fear has been upon me ever since, haunting my rest at night, disturbing my peace by day," resumed Lady Verner. "I must speak of it to you, Sir Henry. Absurd as the notion really is, and as at times it appears to me that it must be, still it does intrude, and I should scarcely be acting an honourable part by you to conceal it, sad as the calamity would be."

Lucy looked up in surprise. Sir Henry in a sort of puzzled wonder.

"When she refused Lord Garle, whom she acknowledged she *liked*, and forbid him to entertain any future hope whatever, I naturally began to

look about me for the cause. I could only come to one conclusion, I am sorry to say—that she cared too much for another."

Lucy sat in an agony; the scarlet of her face changing to whiteness.

"I arrived at the conclusion, I say," continued Lady Verner, "and I began to consider whom the object could be. I called over in my mind all the gentlemen she was in the habit of seeing; and unfortunately there was only one—only one upon whom my suspicions could fix. I recalled phrases of affection openly lavished upon him by Lucy; I remembered that there was no society she seemed to enjoy and be so much at ease with as his. I have done what I could since to keep him at arm's length: and I shall never forgive myself for having been so blind. But you see I no more thought she, or any other girl, could fall in love with him, than that she could with one of my serving men."

"Lady Verner, you should not say it!" burst forth Lucy, with vehemence, as she turned her white face, her trembling lips, to Lady Verner. "Surely I might refuse to marry Lord Garle without caring unduly for another!"

Lady Verner looked quite aghast at the outburst. "My dear, does not this prove that I am right?"

"But who is it?" interrupted Sir Henry Tempest.

"Alas!—Who! I could almost faint in telling it

to you," groaned Lady Verner. "My unfortunate son, Jan."

The relief was so great to Lucy ; the revulsion of feeling so sudden ; the idea called up altogether so comical, that she clasped her hands one within the other, and laughed out in glee.

"Oh, Lady Verner ! Poor Jan ! I never thought you meant him. Papa," she said, turning eagerly to Sir Henry, "Jan is downright worthy and good, but I should not like to marry him."

"Jan may be worthy ; but he is not handsome," gravely remarked Sir Henry.

"He is better than handsome," returned Lucy. "I shall love Jan all my life, papa. But not in that way."

Her perfect openness, her ease of manner, gave an earnest of the truth with which she spoke : and Lady Verner was summarily relieved of the fear which had haunted her rest.

"Why could you not have told me this before, Lucy ?"

"Dear Lady Verner, how could I tell it you ? How was I to know anything about it ?"

"True," said Lady Verner. "I *was* simple ; to suppose any young lady could ever give a thought to that unfortunate Jan ! You saw him, Sir Henry. Only fancy *his* being my son and his father's ! "

"He is certainly not like either of you," was Sir Henry's reply. "Your other son was like both. Very like his father."

"Ah ! he *is* a son !" spoke Lady Verner, in her

enthusiasm. "A son worth having; a son that his father would be proud of, were he alive. Handsome; good; noble;—there are few like Lionel Verner. I spoke in praise of Lord Garle, but he is not as Lionel. A good husband, a good son, a good *man*. His conduct under his misfortunes was admirable."

"His misfortunes have been like a romance," remarked Sir Henry.

"More like that than reality. You will see him presently. I asked him to dine with me, and expect him in momentarily. Ah, he has had trouble in all ways. His wife brought him nothing else."

"Jan dropped a hint of that," said Sir Henry. "I should think he would not be in a hurry to marry again!"

"I should think not, indeed. He—Lucy, where are you going?"

Lucy turned round with her crimsoned face. "Nowhere, Lady Verner."

"I thought I heard a carriage stop, my dear. See if it is Lionel."

Lucy walked to the window in the other room. Sir Henry followed her. The blue and silver carriage of Verner's Pride was at the court gates, Lionel stepping from it. He came in, looking curiously at the grey head next to Lucy's.

"A noble form, a noble face!" murmured Sir Henry Tempest.

He wore still the mourning for his wife. A handsome man never looks so well in any other

attire. There was no doubt that he divined now who the stranger was, and a glad smile of welcome parted his lips. Sir Henry met him on the threshold, and grasped both his hands.

"I should have known you, Lionel, anywhere, from your likeness to your father."

CHAPTER XXXII.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN JAN.

LIONEL could not let the evening go over without speaking of the great secret. When he and Sir Henry were left together in the dining room, he sought the opportunity. It was afforded by a remark of Sir Henry's.

"After our sojourn in London shall be over, I must look out for a residence, and settle down. Perhaps I shall purchase one. But I must first of all ascertain what locality would be agreeable to Lucy."

"Sir Henry," said Lionel, in a low tone, "Lucy's future residence is fixed upon—if you will accord your permission."

Sir Henry Tempest, who was in the act of raising his wine-glass to his lips, set it down again and looked at Lionel.

"I want her at Verner's Pride."

It appeared that Sir Henry could not understand—did not take in the meaning of the words.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I have loved her for years," answered Lionel, the scarlet spot of emotion rising to his cheeks. "We—we have known each other's sentiments a

long while. But I did not intend to speak more openly to Lucy until I had seen you. To-day, however, in the sudden excitement of hearing of her contemplated departure, I betrayed myself. Will you give her to me, Sir Henry?"

Sir Henry Tempest looked grave. "It cannot have been so very long an attachment," he observed. "The time since your wife's death can only be counted by months."

"True. But the time, since I loved Lucy, can be counted by years. I loved her before I married," he added in a low tone.

"Why, then, have married another?" demanded Sir Henry, after a pause.

"You may well ask it, Sir Henry," he replied, the upright line in his brow showing out just then all too deep and plain. "I engaged myself to my first wife in an unguarded moment: as soon as the word was spoken I became aware that she was less dear to me than Lucy. I might have retracted: but the retraction would have left a stain on my honour that could never be effaced. I am not the first man who has paid by years of penitence for a word spoken in the heat of passion."

True enough! Sir Henry simply nodded his head in answer.

"Yes, I loved Lucy; I married another, loving her; I never ceased loving her all throughout my married life. And I had to force down my feelings; to suppress and hide them in the best manner that I could."

"And Lucy?" involuntarily uttered Sir Henry.

"Lucy—may I dare to say it to you?—loved me," he answered, his breath coming fast. "I believe, from my very heart, that she loved me in that early time, deeply perhaps as I loved her. I have never exchanged a word with her upon the point; but I cannot conceal from myself that it was the unhappy fact."

"Did you know it at the time?"

"No!" he answered, raising his hand to his brow, on which the drops were gathering. "I did not suspect it until it was too late; until I was married. She was so child-like."

Sir Henry Tempest sat in silence, probably revolving the information.

"If you had known it—what then?"

"Do not ask me," replied Lionel, his bewailing tone strangely full of pain. "I cannot tell what I should have done. It would have been Lucy—love—versus honour. And a Verner never sacrificed honour yet. And yet—it seems to me that I sacrificed honour in the course I took. Let the question drop, Sir Henry. It is a time I cannot bear to recur to."

Neither spoke for some minutes. Lionel's face was shaded by his hand. Presently he looked up.

"Do not part us, Sir Henry!" he implored, his voice quite hoarse with its emotion, its earnestness. "We could neither of us bear it. I have waited for her long."

"I will deal candidly with you," said Sir Henry.

“In the old days it was a favourite project of mine and your father’s that our families should become connected by the union of our children—you and Lucy. We only spoke of it to each other; saying nothing to our wives: they might have set to work, women fashion, and urged it on by plotting and planning: *we* were content to let events take their course, and to welcome the fruition, should it come. Nearly the last words Sir Lionel said to me, when he was dying of his wound, were, that he should not live to see the marriage; but he hoped I might. Years afterwards, when Lucy was placed with Lady Verner—I knew no other friend in Europe to whom I would entrust her—her letters to me were filled with Lionel Verner. ‘Lionel was so kind to her!’—‘Everybody liked Lionel!’ In one shape or other you were sure to be the theme. I heard how you lost the estate; of your coming to stay at Lady Verner’s; of a long illness you had there; of your regaining the estate through the death of the Massingbirds; and—next—of your marriage to Frederick Massingbird’s widow. From that time Lucy said less: in fact, her letters were nearly silent as to you: and, for myself, I never gave another thought to the subject. Your present communication has taken me entirely by surprise.”

“But you will give her to me?”

“I had rather—forgive me if I speak candidly—that she married one who had not called another woman wife.”

“I heartily wish I never had called another woman

wife," was the response of Lionel. "But I cannot alter the past. I shall not make Lucy the less happy; and, for loving her—I tell you that my love for her, throughout, has been so great, as to have put it almost beyond the power of suppression."

A servant entered, and said, my lady was waiting tea. Lionel waved his hand towards the man with an impatient movement, and they were left at peace again.

"You tell me that her heart is engaged in this, as well as yours?" resumed Sir Henry.

A half-smile flitted for a moment over Lionel's face; he was recalling Lucy's whispered words to him that very afternoon.

"Yes," he answered, "her heart is bound up in me: I may almost say her life. If ever love served out its apprenticeship, Sir Henry, ours has. It is stronger than time and change."

"Well, I suppose you must have her," conceded Sir Henry. "But for your own marriage, I should have looked on this as a natural result. What about the revenues of Verner's Pride?"

"I am in debt," freely acknowledged Lionel. "In my wife's time we spent too much, and outran our means. Part of my income for three or four years must be set apart to pay it off."

He might have said, "In my wife's time *she* spent too much;" said it with truth. But, as he spared her feelings, living, so he spared her memory, dead.

"Whoever takes Lucy, takes thirty thousand

pounds on her wedding-day," quietly remarked Sir Henry Tempest.

The words quite startled Lionel. "Thirty thousand pounds!" he repeated mechanically.

"Thirty thousand pounds. Did you think I should waste all my best years in India, Lionel, and save up nothing for my only child?"

"I never thought about it," was Lionel's answer. "Or, if I ever did think, I suppose I judged by my father. He saved no money."

"He had not the opportunity that I have had. And he died early. The appointment I held, out there, has been a lucrative one. That will be the amount of Lucy's present fortune."

"I am glad I did not know it!" heartily affirmed Lionel.

"It might have made the winning her more difficult, I suppose you think?"

"Not the winning *her*," was Lionel's answer, the self-conscious smile again on his lips. "The winning your consent, Sir Henry."

"It has not been so hard a task, either," quaintly remarked Sir Henry as he rose. "I am giving her to you, understand, for your father's sake. In the trust that you are the same honourably good man, standing well before the world and Heaven, that he was. Unless your looks belie you, you are not degenerate."

Lionel stood before him, almost too agitated to speak. Sir Henry stopped him, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"No thanks, Lionel. Gratitude? You can pay all that to Lucy after she shall be your wife."

They went together into the drawing-room, arm-in-arm. Sir Henry advanced straight to his daughter.

"What am I to say to you, Lucy? He has been talking secrets."

She looked up, like a startled fawn. But a glimpse at Lionel's face reassured her, bringing the roses into her cheeks. Lady Verner, wondering, gazed at them in amazement, and Lucy hid her hot cheeks on her father's breast.

"Am I to scold you? Falling in love without my permission!"

The tone, the loving arm wound round her, brought to her confidence. She could almost afford to be saucy.

"Don't be angry, papa!" were her whispered words. "It might have been worse."

"Worse!" returned Sir Henry, trying to get a look at her face. "You independent child! How could it have been worse?"

"It might have been Jan, you know, papa."

And Sir Henry Tempest burst into an irrepressible laugh as he sat down.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUNDRY ARRIVALS.

WE have had many fine days in this history, but never a finer one gladdened Deerham than the last that has to be recorded, ere its scene in these pages shall close. It was one of those rarely lovely days that now and then do come to us in autumn. The air was clear, the sky bright, the sun hot as in summer, the grass green almost as in spring. It was evidently a day of rejoicing. Deerham, since the afternoon, seemed to be taking holiday, and as the sun began to get lower in the heavens, groups in their best attire were wending their way towards Verner's Pride.

There was the centre of attraction. A *fête*—or whatever you might please to call it, where a great deal of feasting is going on—was about to be held on no mean scale. Innumerable tables, some large, some small, were set out in different parts of the grounds, their white cloths intimating that they were to be laden with good cheer. Tynn and his satellites bustled about, and believed they had never had such a day of work before.

A day of pleasure also, unexampled in their lives: for their master, Lionel Verner, was about to bring home his bride.

Everybody was flocking to the spot: old and young, gentle and simple. The Elmsleys and the half-starved Hooks; the Hautleys and those ill-doing Dawsons; the Miss Wests and their pupils; Lady Verner and the Frosts; Mr. Bitterworth in a hand-chair, his gouty foot swathed up in linen; Mrs. Duff, who had shut up her shop to come; Dan, in some new clothes; Mr. Peckaby and lady; Chuff the blacksmith, with rather a rolling gait; and Master Cheese and Jan. In short, all Deerham and its neighbourhood had turned out.

This was to be Master Cheese's last appearance on any scene—so far as Deerham was concerned. The following day he would quit Jan for good; and that gentleman's new assistant, a qualified practitioner, had arrived, and was present. Somewhat different arrangements from what had been originally contemplated were about to be entered on, as regarded Jan. The Miss Wests had found their school prosper so well during the half-year it had been established, that they were desirous of taking the house entirely on their own hands. They commanded the good will and respect of Deerham, if their father did not. Possibly it was because he did not, and that their position was sympathised with and commiserated, that their scheme of doing something to place themselves independent of him, obtained so large a share of patronage. They wished to take the whole house on their own hands. Easy Jan acquiesced; Lionel thought it the best thing in all ways; and Jan began to look out for

another home. But Jan seemed to waver in the fixing upon one. First, he had thought of lodgings ; next he went to see a small, pretty new house that had just been built close to the Miss Wests.' "It is too small for you, Mr. Jan," had observed Miss Deborah. "It will hold me and my assistant, and the boy, and a cook, and the surgery," answered Jan. "And that's all I want."

Neither the lodgings, however, nor the small house, had been taken ; and now it was rumoured that Jan's plans were changed again. The report ran that the surgery was to remain where it was, and that the assistant, a gentleman of rather mature age, would remain with it; occupying Jan's bedroom (which had been renovated after the explosion of Master Cheese), and taking his meals with the Miss Wests : Jan meanwhile being about that tasty mansion called Belvedere House, which was situated midway between his old residence and Deerham Court. Deerham's curiosity was uncommonly excited upon the point. What, in the name of improbability, could plain Jan Verner want with a fine place like that ? He'd have to keep five or six servants, if he went there. The most feasible surmise that could be arrived at was, that Jan was about to establish a mad-house—as Deerham was in the habit of phrasing a receptacle for insane patients—of the private, genteel order. Deerham felt *very* curious ; and Jan, being a person whom they felt at ease to question without ceremony, was besieged upon the subject. Jan's answer (all they

could get from him this time) was—that he *was* thinking of taking Belvedere House, but had no intention yet of setting up a mad-house. And affairs were in this stage at the present time.

Lionel and his bride were expected momentarily, and the company of all grades formed themselves into groups as they awaited them. They had been married in London some ten days ago, where Sir Henry Tempest had remained, after quitting Deerham with Lucy. The twelvemonth had been allowed to go by subsequent to the death of Sibylla. Lionel liked that all things should be done seemingly and in order. Sir Henry was now on a visit to Sir Edmund Hautley and Decima: he was looking out for a suitable residence in the neighbourhood, where he meant to settle. This gathering at Verner's Pride to welcome Lionel, had been a thought of Sir Henry's and old Mr. Bitterworth's. "Why not give the poor an afternoon's holiday for once?" cried Sir Henry. "I will repay them the wages they must lose in taking it." And so—here was the gathering, and Tynn had carried out his orders for the supply of plenty to eat and drink.

They formed in groups, listening for the return of the carriage, which had gone in state to the railway station to receive them. All, save Master Cheese. He walked about somewhat disconsolately, thinking the proceedings rather slow. In his wanderings he came upon Tynn, placing good things upon one of the tables, which was laid in an alcove.

"When's the feasting going to begin?" asked he.

"Not until Mr. Verner shall have come," replied Tynn. "The people will be wanting to cheer him; and they can't do that well, if they are busy round the tables, eating."

"Who's the feast intended for?" resumed Master Cheese.

"It's chiefly intended for those who don't get feasts at home," returned Tynn. "But anybody can partake of it that pleases."

"I should like just a snack," said Master Cheese. "I had such a short dinner to-day. Now that all those girls are stuck down at the dining-table, Miss Deb sometimes forgets to ask one a third time to meat," he added in a grumbling tone. "And there was nothing but a rubbishing rice pudding after it to-day! So I'd like to take a little, Tynn. I feel quite empty."

"You can take as much as you choose," said Tynn, who had known Master Cheese's appetite before to-day. "Begin at once, if you like, without waiting for the others. Some of the tables are spread."

"I think I will," said Master Cheese, looking lovingly at a pie on the table over which they were standing. "What's inside this pie, Tynn?"

Tynn bent his head to look closely. "I think that's partridge," said he. "There are plenty of other sorts. And there's a vast quantity of cold meats: beef and ham, and that. Sir Henry Tempest said I was not to stint 'em."

"I like partridge pie," said Master Cheese, as he seated himself before it, his mouth watering. "I have not tasted one this season. Do you happen to have a drop of bottled ale, Tynn?"

"I'll fetch a bottle," answered Tynn. "Is there anything else you'd like, sir?"

"What else is there?" asked Master Cheese. "Anything in the sweets line?"

"There's about a hundred baked plum puddings. My wife has got some custards, too, in her larder. The custards are not intended for out here, but you can have one."

Master Cheese wiped his damp face: he had gone all over into a glow of delight. "Bring a pudding and a custard or two, Tynn," said he. "There's nothing in the world half so nice as a plate of plum pudding swimming in custard."

Tynn was in the act of supplying his wants, when a movement and a noise in the distance came floating on the air. Tynn dashed the dish of custards on to the table, and ran like the rest. Everybody ran—except Master Cheese.

It was turning slowly into the grounds—the blue and silver carriage of the Verners, its four horses prancing under their studded harness. Lionel and his wife of a few days descended from it, when they found themselves in the midst of this unexpected crowd. They had cause, those serfs, to shout out a welcome to their lord; for never again would they live in a degrading position, if he could help it. The various improvements for their welfare, which he

had so persistently and hopefully planned, were not only begun, but nearly ended.

Sir Henry clasped Lucy's sweet face to his own bronzed one, pushing back her white bonnet to take his kiss from it. Then followed Lady Verner, then Decima, then Mary Elmsley. Lucy shook herself free, and laughed.

"I don't like so many kisses all at once," said she.

Lionel was everywhere. Shaking hands with old Mr. Bitterworth, with the Miss Wests, with Sir Edmund Hautley, with Lord Garle, with the Countess of Elmsley, with all that came in his way. Next he looked round upon a poorer class; and the first hand taken in his, was Robin Frost's. By-and-by he encountered Jan.

"Well, Jan, old fellow!" said he, his affection shining out in his earnest, dark-blue eyes, "I am glad to be with you again. Is Cheese here?"

"He came," replied Jan. "But where he has disappeared to, I can't tell."

"Please, sir, I see'd him just now in a alcove," interposed Dan Duff, addressing Lionel.

"And how are you, Dan?" asked Lionel, with his kindly smile. "Saw Mr. Cheese in an alcove, did you?"

"It was that there one," responded Dan, extending his finger in the direction of a spot not far distant. "He was tucking in at a pie. I see'd him, please sir."

"I must go to him," said Lionel, winding his arm

within Jan's, and proceeding in the direction of the alcove. Master Cheese, his hands full of cold pudding and his mouth covered with custard, started up when surprised at his feast.

"It's only a little bit I'm tasting," said he, apologetically, "against it's time to begin. I hope you have come back well, sir."

"Taste away, Cheese," replied Lionel with a laugh, as he cast his eyes on some remaining fragments. "Partridge pie! do you like it?"

"Like it!" returned Master Cheese, the tears coming into his eyes with eagerness. "I wish I could be where I should have nothing else for a whole week."

"The first week's holiday you get at Bartholomew's, you must come and pay Verner's Pride a visit, and we will keep you supplied. Mrs. Verner will be glad to see you."

Master Cheese gave a great gasp. The words seemed too good to be real.

"Do you mean it, sir?" he asked.

"Of course I mean it," replied Lionel. "I owe you a debt, you know. But for your having blown yourself and the room up, I might not now be in possession of Verner's Pride. You come and spend a week with us when you can."

"That's glorious, and I'm much obliged to you, sir," said Master Cheese in an ecstacy. "I think I'll have just another custard on the strength of it."

Jan was imperturbable—he had seen too much of

Master Cheese for any display to affect him—but Lionel laughed heartily as they left the gentleman and the alcove. How well he looked—Lionel! The indented line of pain had gone from his brow: he was as a man at rest within.

“Jan, I feel truly glad at the news sent to us a day or two ago!” he exclaimed, pressing his brother’s arm. “I always feared you would not marry. I never thought you would marry one so desirable as Mary Elmsley.”

“I don’t think I’d have had anybody else,” answered Jan. “I like her; always did like her; and if she has taken a fancy to me, and doesn’t mind putting up with a husband that’s called out at all hours, why—it’s all right.”

“You will not give up your profession, Jan?”

“Give up my profession?” echoed Jan, in surprise, staring with all his eyes at Lionel. “What should I do that for?”

“When Mary shall be Lady Mary Verner, she may be for wishing it.”

“No she won’t,” answered Jan. “She knows her wishing it would be of no use. She marries my profession as much as she marries me. It is all settled. Lord Elmsley makes it a point that I take my degree, and I don’t mind doing that to please him. I shall be a hard-working doctor always, and Mary knows it.”

“Have you taken Belvedere House?”

“I intend to take it. Mary likes it, and I can afford it, with her income joined to mine. If she

is a lady, she's not a fine one," added Jan, "and I shall be just as quiet and comfortable as I have been in the old place. She says she'll see to the house-keeping and to my shirts, and—"

Jan stopped. They had come up with Lady Verner, and Mary Elmsley. Lionel spoke laughingly.

"So Jan is appreciated at last!"

Lady Verner lifted her hands with a deprecatory movement. "It took me three whole days before I would believe it," she gravely said. "Even now, there are times when I think Mary must be playing with him."

Lady Mary shook her head with a blush and a smile. Lionel took her on his arm, and walked away with her.

"You cannot think how happy it has made me and Lucy. We never thought Jan was, or could be, appreciated."

"He was by me. He is worth—shall I tell it you, Lionel?—more than all the rest of Deerham put together. Yourself included."

"I will indorse the assertion," answered Lionel. "I am glad you are going to have him."

"I would have had him, had he asked me, years ago," candidly avowed Lady Mary.

"I was inquiring of Jan, whether you would not wish him to give up his profession. He was half offended with me for suggesting it."

"If Jan could ever be the one to lead an idle, useless life, I think half my love for him would die

out," was her warm answer. "It was Jan's practical industry, his way of always doing the right in straightforward simplicity, that I believe first won me to like him. This world was made to work in; the next for rest—as I look upon it, Lionel. I shall be prouder of being wife to the surgeon Jan Verner, than I should be had I married a duke's eldest son."

"He is to take his degree, he says."

"I believe so: but he will practise generally all the same — just as he does now. Not that I care that he should become Dr. Verner: it is papa."

"If he—— Why, who can they be?"

Lionel Verner's interrupted sentence and question of surprise were caused by the appearance of some singular-looking forms who were stalking into the grounds. Poor, stooping, miserable, travel-soiled objects, looking fit for nothing but the tramp-house. A murmur of astonishment burst from all present when they were recognised. It was Grind's lot. Grind and his family, who had gone off with the Mormons, returning now in humility, like dogs with burnt tails.

"Why, Grind, can it be you?" exclaimed Lionel, gazing with pity at the man's despairing aspect.

He, poor meek Grind, not less meek and civil than of yore, sat down upon a bench and burst into tears. They gathered round him in crowds, while he told his tale. How they had, after innumerable

hardships on the road, too long to recite then, after losing some of their party by death, two of his children being amongst them—how they had at length reached the Salt Lake city, so gloriously depicted by Brother Jarrum. And what did they find? Instead of an abode of peace and plenty, of luxury, of immunity from work, they found misery and discomfort. Things were strange to them, and they were strange in turn. He'd describe it all another time, he said; but it was quite enough to tell them what it was, by saying that he resolved to come away if possible, and face again the hardships of the way, though it was only to die in the old land, than he'd stop in it. Brother Jarrum was a awful impostor, so to have led 'em away!

"Wasn't there no saints?" breathlessly asked Susan Peckaby, who had elbowed herself to the front.

"Saints!" echoed Grind. "Yes, they be saints! A iniketous, bad doing, sensitive lot. I'd starve on a crust here, sooner nor I'd stop among 'em. Villains!"

Poor Grind probably substituted the word "sensitive" for another, in his narrow acquaintance with the English language. Susan Peckaby seemed to resent this new view of things. She was habited in the very plum-coloured gown which had been prepared for the start, the white paint having been got out of it by some mysterious process, perhaps by the turpentine suggested by Chuff. It looked tumbled and crinkled, the beauty altogether gone

out of it. Her husband, Peckaby, stood behind, grinning.

"Villains, them saints was, was they?" said he.

"They was villains," emphatically answered Grind.

"And the saintesses?" continued Peckaby—
"What of them?"

"The less said about 'em the better, them saintesses," responded Grind. "We should give 'em another name over here, we should. I had to leave my eldest girl behind me," he added, lifting his face in a pitying appeal to Mr. Verner's. "She warn't but fifteen, and one of them men took her, and she's his thirteenth wife."

"I say, Grind," put in the sharp voice of Mrs. Duff, "what's become of Nancy, as lived up here?"

"She died on the road," he answered. "She married Brother Jarrum in New York—"

"Married Brother Jarrum in New York!" interrupted Polly Dawson, tartly. "You are asleep, Grind. It was Mary Green as married him. Leastways, news, that she did, come back to us here."

"He married 'em both," answered Grind. "The consekence of which was, that the two took to quarrelling perpetual. It was nothing but snarling and fighting everlasting. Nancy again Mary, and Mary again her. We hadn't nothing else with 'em all the way to the Salt Lake city, and Nancy, she got ill. Some said 'twas pining; some said

'twas a in'ard complaint as took her; some said 'twas the hardships killed her: the cold, and the fatigue, and the bad food, and the starvation. Any how, Nancy died."

"And what became of Mary?" rather more meekly inquired Mrs. Peckaby.

"She's Jarrum's wife still. He have got about six of 'em, he have. They *be* saints, they *be*!"

"They bain't as bad off as the saintesses," interrupted Mrs. Grind. "They has their own way, the saints, and the saintesses don't. Regular cowed down the saintesses be; they daredn't say as their right hand's their own. That poor sick lady as went with us, Miss Kitty Bayntun—and none on us thought she'd live to get there, but she did, and one of the saints chose her. She come to us just afore we got away, and she said she wanted to write a letter to her mother to tell her how unhappy she was, fit to die with it. But she knowed the letter could never be got to her in England, cause letters ain't allowed to leave the city, and she must stop in misery for her life, she said; for she couldn't never undertake the journey back again, even if she could get clear away; it would kill her. But she'd like her mother to know how them Mormons deceived with their tales, and what sort of a place New Jerusalem was."

Grind turned again to Lionel.

"It is just blasphemy, sir, for them to say what they do: calling it the holy city, and the New

Jerusalem. Couldn't they be stopped at it, and from deluding poor ignorant people here with their tales?"

"The only way of stopping it is for people to take their tales for what they are worth," said Lionel.

Grind gave a groan. "People is credulous, sir, when they think they are going to better theirselves. Sir," he added, with a yearning, pleading look, "could I have a bit of work again upon the old estate, just to keep us from starving? I shan't hanker after much now: to live here upon the soil will be enough, after having been at that Salt Lake city. It's a day's wonder, and 'ud take a day to tell, the way we stole away from it, and how we at last got home."

"You shall have work, Grind, as much as you can do," quietly answered Lionel. "Work, and a home, and—I hope—plenty. If you will go there"—pointing to the tables—"with your wife and children, you will find something to eat and drink."

Grind clasped his hands together in an attitude of thankfulness, the tears streaming down his face. They had walked from Liverpool.

"What about the ducks, Grind?" called out one of the Dawsons. "Did you get 'em in abundance?"

Grind turned his haggard face round.

"I never see a single duck the whole time I stopped there. If ducks was there, we didn't see 'em."

"And what about the white donkeys, Grind?" added Peckaby. "Be *they* in plenty?"

Grind was ignorant of the white donkey story, and took the question literally. "I never see none," he repeated. "There's nothing white there but the great Salt Lake, which strikes the eyes with blindness——"

"Won't I treat you to a basting!"

The emphatic remark, coming from Mrs. Duff, caused a diversion, especially agreeable to Susan Peckaby. The unhappy Dan, by some unexplainable cause, had torn the sleeve of his new jacket to ribbons. He sheltered himself from wrath behind Chuff the blacksmith, and the company began to pour in a stream towards the tables.

The sun had sunk in the west when Verner's Pride was left in quiet; the gratified feasters, Master Cheese included, having wended their way home. Lionel was with his wife at the window of her dressing-room, where he had formerly stood with Sibylla. The rosy hue of the sky played upon Lucy's face. Lionel watched it as he stood with his arm round her. Lifting her eyes suddenly, she saw how grave his looked, as they were bent upon her.

"What are you thinking of, Lionel?"

"Of you, my darling. Standing with you here in our own home, feeling that you are mine at last; that nothing, save the hand of Death, can part us, I can scarcely yet believe in my great happiness."

Lucy raised her hand, and drew his face down to hers. "I can," she whispered. "It is very real." "Ay, yes! it is real," he said, his tone one of almost painful intensity. "God be thanked! But we waited. Lucy, *how* we waited for it!"

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